

The Opal of Carmalovitch
by Max Pemberton

alfred

HITCHCOCK'S

mystery magazine

January, 1984 **\$1.50**

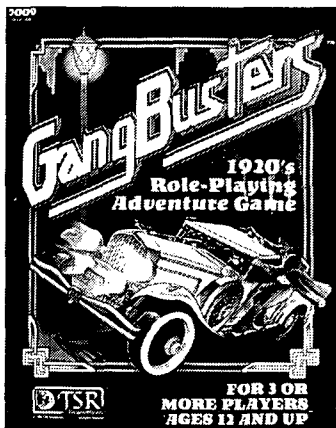


The
Town Club Murders
by Dick Stodghill
9 Stories!



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Organized Crime Stirs Public Rage



For **FREE** catalog
of games and
accessories write to:

TSR Hobbies, Inc.
POB 756
Dept. 170-123
Lake Geneva, WI
53147

In the UK:
TSR Hobbies, (UK) Ltd.
The Mill Rathmore Rd.
Cambridge, England
CB1 4AD

**Solution Discovered...
GANGBUSTERS™ Game
Plays Major Role.**

Lakefront City, USA

Citizens are finding
GANGBUSTERS™ game to
be their best means to create
strategies to crush crime in
the streets.

It appears that TSR Hobbies
has created another outstand-
ing role-playing game...one
that may very well equal the
success of their world-famous
DUNGEONS & DRAGONS®
game.

**Read all about
it in the new
GANGBUSTERS™
Roaring Twenties
Role-Playing Game.**



DUNGEONS & DRAGONS and GANGBUSTERS are trademarks owned by TSR Hobbies, Inc.
©1982 TSR Hobbies, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

CONTENTS



SHORT STORIES

THE TOWN CLUB MURDERS by Dick Stodghill	5
THE SEA MONSTER WORE DIAMONDS by John H. Dirckx	26
THE TAKAMOKU JOSEKI by Sara Paretsky	33
THE LAST BINGE by Charles R. McConnell	43
THE KILL FILE by Sybil Baker	71
THE MATCHBOOK DETECTIVE by E. E. Aydelotte	98
MAIDEN IN DISTRESS by Mike Cohen	112
RANDY SEA: THE PRIME SUSPECT by Percy Spurlark Parker	125

MYSTERY CLASSIC

THE OPAL OF CARMALOVITCH by Max Pemberton	140
--	------------

DEPARTMENTS

EDITOR'S NOTES	4
BOOKED & PRINTED by Mary Cannon	56
THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH	61
CASES ON FILE: The Legend of Third Creek by David Braly	62
MURDER BY DIRECTION by Peter Shaw	91
FRAMES OF REFERENCE by Peter Christian	94
UNSOLVED by George J. Summers	96
SOLUTION TO THE DECEMBER "UNSOLVED"	153
THE STORY THAT WON	154

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE Vol. 29, No. 1, January, 1984. Published 13 times a year, every 28 days, by Davis Publications, Inc., at \$1.50 a copy. Annual subscription \$19.50 in the U.S.A. and possessions; \$23.00 elsewhere payable in advance in U.S. funds. Allow 6 to 8 weeks for change of address. Editorial and Executive Offices, 380 Lexington Ave., N.Y., N.Y. 10017. Subscription orders and mail regarding subscriptions should be sent to P.O. Box 1932, Marion, O. 43305. Second class postage paid at New York, N.Y., and at additional mailing office, Canadian 3rd class postage paid at Windsor, Ontario; 2nd class pending. © 1983 by Davis Publications, Inc., all rights reserved. Protection secured under the Universal Copyright Convention. Reproduction or use without express permission of editorial or pictorial content in any manner is prohibited. Printed in U.S.A. All submissions must be accompanied by stamped self-addressed envelope; the Publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts. **POSTMASTER:** Send form 3579 to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, P.O. Box 1932, Marion, Ohio 43305. In Canada return to 628 Monmouth Rd., Windsor, Ontario N8Y3L1.

ISSN: 0002-5224.

42 PLOTS TO SUSPENSE,



6 BOOKS FOR 99¢ with membership

Values up to \$117.15
in Publishers' Editions!

How The Mystery Guild works: Get 6 exciting books for 99¢ (plus shipping and handling) PLUS a free tote bag when accepted as a member. We reserve the right to reject any application. However, once accepted as a member, if you are not satisfied, return the books at Club expense within 10 days. Your membership will be cancelled and you'll owe nothing.

Big selection, big savings! About every 4 weeks (14 times a year), you'll get the Club bulletin describing the 2 featured Selections and Alternates. Plus, up to 4 times a year, you may receive offers of special Selections—all at discounts off publishers' prices.* To get the 2 featured Selections, do nothing;

they'll be shipped automatically. If you prefer an Alternate or no book at all, return the form provided with your preference by the date specified. That date allows you 10 days to decide. If you have less than 10 days and get an unwanted Selection, return it at Club expense and owe nothing. A shipping and handling charge is added to all shipments.

Easy purchase plan! You need buy only 4 books at regular low Club prices during your first year of membership; then continue to enjoy Club benefits without obligation or resign at any time. The Mystery Guild offers its own complete, hardbound editions, sometimes altered in size to fit special presses and save you even more.

Club editions save you up to 60% off publishers' list prices quoted above.

⊗ Explicit sex,
violence, and language.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

**FILL YOUR NIGHTS WITH
MYSTERY AND MURDER.**



**FREE
TOTE BAG**
with membership



THE MYSTERY GUILD® Dept. ER-466
Garden City, N.Y.

Please accept my application for membership in The Mystery Guild and send me the 6 books indicated below. Bill me only 99¢ (plus shipping and handling). I understand that I need buy only 4 books at regular low Club prices during the first year of my membership to complete my commitment. My membership will be subject to the terms and conditions presented in this ad.

No-risk guarantee: If not delighted after examining my 6 selections, I may return the books within 10 days at Club expense. My membership will be cancelled and I will owe nothing. I may keep the tote bag.

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.

Mr. _____
Ms. _____
(Please print) Age _____

Address _____ Apt. No. _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Members accepted in U.S.A. and Canada only. Canadian members will be serviced from Canada. Offer slightly different in Canada.

35-MG95

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EDITOR'S NOTES

by Cathleen Jordan

The second annual Private Eye Writers of America awards — to be presented at Bouchercon XIV—have not yet been given out as we go to press with this issue, but the nominees are in, and we're delighted with the accolades thereby bestowed on several of AHMM's writers. We will soon report on Bouchercon and the PWA winners, but in the meantime, we thought you'd like to know who the nominees were. All the novels and stories included, of course, feature private eyes.

BEST HARDCOVER NOVEL OF 1982:

Eight Million Ways To Die by Lawrence Sanders (Arbor House); *"A" Is for Alibi* by Sue Grafton (Holt, Rinehart); *Gravedigger* by Joseph Hansen (Holt, Rinehart); *A Piece of the Silence* by Jack Livingston (St. Martin's); *Ceremony* by Robert B. Parker (Delacorte).

BEST PAPERBACK NOVEL OF 1982:

Nevsky's Return by Dimitri Gat

(Avon); *The Cana Diversion* by William Campbell Gault (Raven House); *Pieces of Death* by Jack Lynch (Fawcett); *Smoked Out* by Warren Murphy (Pocket).

BEST SHORT STORY OF 1982: "Meet Athalia Goode" by Raleigh Bond (EQMM, 1/27/82); "Dead Soldier" by Loren D. Estleman (AHMM, Mid-September, 1982); "My Little Girl" by Kenneth Gavrell (AHMM, May, 1982); "What You Don't Know Can Hurt You" by John Lutz (AHMM, November, 1982); "Cardula and the Locked Rooms" by Jack Ritchie (AHMM, 3/31/82).

And since we're on the subject of private eyes, we're glad to have the chance to mention that Loren D. Estleman's newest Amos Walker novel, *The Glass Highway*, has just been published by Houghton Mifflin (the most recent Amos Walker story in AHMM was "Greek-town," August, 1983).

Cathleen Jordan, Editor; Lois Adams, Associate Editor; Ralph Rubino, Art Director; Gerry Hawkins, Associate Art Director; Ron Kuliner, Art Editor; Marianne Weldon, Associate Designer; Carl Bartee, Production Director; Carole Dixon, Production Manager; Iris Temple, Director, Subsidiary Rights; Barbara Bazyn, Manager, Contracts & Permissions; Michael Dillon, Circulation Director, Retail Marketing; Paul Pearson, Newsstand Operations Manager; Kathy Tully-Cestaro, Circulation Manager, Subscriptions; Irene Bozoki, Classified Advertising Director; William F. Battista, Advertising Director (New York: 212-557-9100; Chicago: 312-346-0712; Los Angeles: 213-785-3114).

Joel Davis, President & Publisher; Leonard F. Pinto, Vice President & General Manager; Carole Sinclair, Vice President, Marketing & Editorial; Leonard H. Habas, Vice President, Circulation; Fred Edinger, Vice President, Finance.

FICTION

The Town Club Murders

by Dick Stodghill

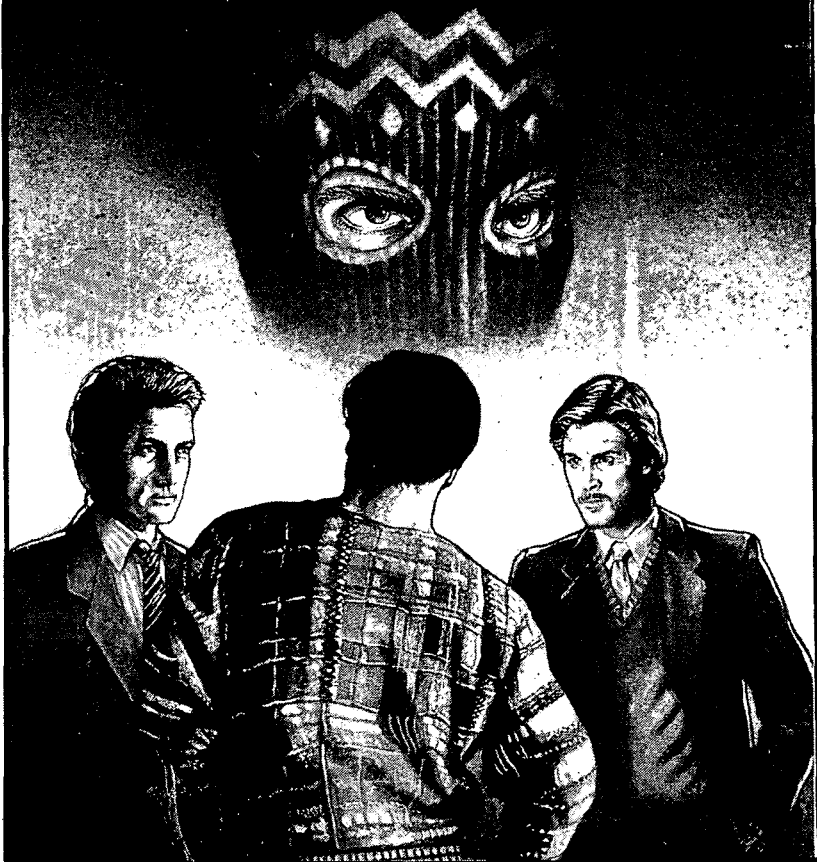


Illustration by Ray Lago

To enter the tavern you climb six concrete steps worn smooth by the comings and goings of countless pairs of feet. Once inside, there is little enticement to remain. On the street or in the building you feel that air of weariness that is as much a part of any factory district bar as the neon beer sign in the window.

That's under favorable circumstances. Now, on a dank September night when fog hides the wilted stalks of corn and decrepit industrial areas on the flatlands of central Indiana, it is bathed in a misty red that doesn't come from the Budweiser emblem over the back-bar. Someone armed with a sawed-off shotgun has used it on a man and woman seated in a booth to demonstrate why they call it a scatter gun.

I turn away after one look, revolted. So does Greg Staley. He pulls a handkerchief from his pocket, wiping his face with it as he says, "No matter how much you see of this kind of thing, you never get used to it."

Then, because he is a detective and it is his job, he turns again for a closer look. I walk back to where four men with parchment faces stand huddled together near the front of the bar. The tavern's aptly named The Before and After, a place to buy a drink so you can face up to another day in the sweat-

shop, and another drink when you have gotten through it. Or two or five.

"What happened?" I ask, taking my notebook from a side pocket of the worn corduroy jacket I have decided should be good for one more season of cold weather. At the time I bought it, corduroy was the cheapest material on the racks. Now it has become fashionable, and replacing the jacket would cost more than I normally pay for a suit. It doesn't matter; no one trusts a well-dressed newspaperman.

The men look at each other, each waiting for someone else to answer my question. Finally one of them, from appearances the bartender, says, "You're Hal Blinn, right?"

I nod, so he says, "I didn't know you covered this kinda thing."

"I don't," I tell him. "I was at the police station when the call came in and tagged along. What happened here?"

Suddenly everyone is eager to talk. "They was just sittin' there when this guy comes in and cuts loose," says a man with the gaunt look and penetrating eyes of a young John Carradine on the midnight movie.

"Right," agrees another, nodding a round head that rests on wide shoulders without much neck between. "Never says a

word, just walks back to 'em and blasts away. He was wearin' one of them masks . . . wha'd'ya call 'em?"

"A ski mask," says the most intelligent looking of the quartet. "Black or navy blue with two white stripes. He did say something, though, just before he pulled the trigger. Just a few words so low you couldn't hear them up at the bar, and I was sitting just a few stools away."

No-neck turns a skeptical eye toward him. "I didn't hear nothin'."

The other, a rangy man with a face weathered by year-round sun and wind, smiles patiently. "He wasn't talking to you, Joe. He didn't mean for you to hear."

"Oh," replies No-neck, accepting the explanation.

I look at the weathered man and say, "What happened after he shot them?"

Before he can respond, the bartender says, "He just turned and walked back out. Calm as could be, like nothin' had happened."

"Nobody tried to stop him?"

"It was too fast," the weathered man replies. "Too much of a shock. By the time any of us reacted, he was gone."

I nod, understanding how it must have been. I move my head toward the booth where Staley and two other detectives are still busy and say, "Does anybody know who they were?"

Heads shake and the bartender says, "They come in a few times in the past but kept to themselves, never said nothin' to nobody I can recall." As an afterthought he adds, "'Cept to order drinks, but they never drunk much and mostly stuck around only about an hour."

Staley walks over, frowning at me. He doesn't say anything, but he is obviously displeased because I have been interrogating witnesses before he has had the opportunity. I step back a little, not feeling guilty but preferring to avoid annoying him more than necessary. As I do so, the front door is opened by the patrolman stationed there, and Steve Granger, the *News-Banner* police reporter, walks in.

He is surprised to see me and unless I misread his reaction, not happy about it. If he thinks I am crossing his beat, he should know better. I greet him coolly but then take him aside and give him what information I have gathered. He is welcome to it. I want nothing more than a fast trip back uptown, a warm bar, and a tall drink.

The lobby of the old Delaware Hotel is crowded when I walk in. A meeting has just broken up, and politicians are everywhere. Under the best of conditions I want as little to do with them as possible. The present circumstances make the glad-handing and boisterous

talk more than I can stomach, and the thought of seeking refuge in my third-floor rooms crosses my mind. But I want a drink and this is my home, so I refuse to let them take it over. I head for the bar, nodding curtly to those who greet me and refusing to allow anyone to swerve me from my course.

It comes as no surprise to find Driscoll lounging on a stool, a glass of Bushmills in front of him. He is the *News-Banner's* court reporter, and ordinarily I enjoy his company. I am keyed up, though, and say, "What are you doing here, Grady?"

He glances around, feigning bewilderment. "It's a public place, isn't it?"

He is at the hotel because I have not turned up at Horner's Tavern. Trying to tell him there are times when a person feels like being alone would be a waste of breath, so I sag down on the stool beside him and give the bartender a signal he has come to know means a double martini on the rocks.

Driscoll recognizes the other signals I am giving off and pumps me until he has all the lurid details. Still he wants more, and nothing short of the killer's name, motive, and whereabouts will satisfy him. I grow surly and soon he is beligerent. "I know," he growls, "you just want to hold the details for 'Around Town with Hal

Blinn.' You think that column of yours is the first thing people turn to. Well let me tell you something, bigshot, that doesn't—"

"Oh, shut up, Grady," I tell him, relaxed by his predictable outburst. Driscoll is angry, the world is back to normal.

Two days pass without an arrest being made. The victims were a Daniel Collins and Roberta Dillard. Both had nicknames. Collins' was "Red" and it appeared in the newspapers. The woman's was "Anytime Roberta," and it didn't. They were married, but not to each other, and had been meeting clandestinely for several months. Collins worked on the shipping and receiving dock at the wire mill, was a union steward, had three kids ranging from seven to seventeen. Anytime Roberta was a day-light waitress at a downtown Greek restaurant and the mother of two teenage children, each born to separate previous marriages. Her latest husband is a stun man at the meatpacking plant and both exes live in Midland. The obvious motive has leaped to all minds, and no one seems much interested or concerned.

Steve Granger comes into the back room of Horner's while I am having a late lunch of hot chili and beer, pulls out a chair,

and calls to Jack Horner to bring him the same. When my bowl is empty I say, "Where does the investigation stand?"

"Right where it began. They've questioned the woman's husband three times, but his abili is solid as a rock."

"Maybe he hired someone to do it. Or what about the man's wife? Maybe she hired someone."

Granger looks up from his chili, a quizzical expression on his face. "Why does it matter to you?"

"Well, it wasn't the most pleasant sight I've seen lately. Aren't you a little curious about the reason for it?"

"Not really. Somebody's always getting shot in a south-side bar."

Driscoll has come in and immediately takes the offensive. "That's the trouble with you, Granger. You've been on the police beat so long you're starting to act like a cop. Somebody gets blown away in a southside bar, so who cares, right? Keep it on the other side of the tracks and nobody's going to get too excited."

Granger goes on eating, undismayed by Driscoll's outburst. He has been on the receiving end of such tirades before and won't allow anything so commonplace to interfere with his lunch. Driscoll turns away in disgust, unable

to comprehend anyone willing to pass up the opportunity for a good argument.

I crumple up my paper napkin and toss it in the empty bowl, then walk out front and pay the check. People, it seems to me, have been at their worst the past few days, and I have had enough of them. For the first time since childhood I feel an urge to go to the zoo in search of more compatible creatures. But a zoo is just one of many things not to be found in Midland so I settle for going back to the newsroom, which comes closer to being a zoo than anything else available.

When I leave at five o'clock I have had the place to myself for two hours, but that hasn't inspired any desire for company. The evening sun has the pale glow of autumn and is pleasantly warm as I walk two blocks east on Jackson to the Delaware. After checking the mail and as usual finding the box empty, I go to my favorite table in a quiet corner of the dining room without first taking the time to climb the stairs to my rooms.

I am halfway through my second before-dinner martini when Granger and Staley come in together. Granger walks over when he sees me. "Another murder," he says a little excitedly. "Do you know Fletcher Stout?"

"No, but I know who he is."

Everyone in Midland knows who he is because Fletcher Stout is president of The Commercial Bank and Trust Company, a member of numerous boards, one of those men involved in every do-good project that comes along if it offers the chance to have your picture in the paper.

"Somebody shot him from a car as he was leaving the country club," Granger continues. "Right on the front steps with half a dozen people around, but not one of them got a look at the killer. One of the bystanders took a bullet in the leg, though."

"An epidemic," I say halfheartedly. "An epidemic of murder in Midland."

"Believe me, this one is going to shake up the town. Fletcher Stout, it's hard to believe."

"Why is it hard to believe?"

He looks at me as a teacher might look at a not-too-bright first grader. "Come on, Hal, a prominent citizen killed on the front steps of the country club. Things like that just don't happen."

Without intending to, I laugh. Not because someone has been murdered but because Granger's reaction is so out of phase with his response to the murders at The Before and After. I say, "Then Driscoll was right, keep it on the south side. God help us when it spreads to the

country club."

Granger curls one side of his mouth and shakes his head pityingly. He thinks I have had one drink too many and walks away without saying more. I am not sorry to be rid of him.

He was right, of course. The citizenry is outraged. I hear his words repeated a dozen times or more after Midland awakens to *The Morning Sun's* account of the murder—things like this just don't happen. Murder in New York or Chicago or south of Conrail's tracks is to be expected, but not among the nice people of Midland. They have forgotten, because it is convenient to forget such things, that only two months ago murder struck the town's leading family.

Driscoll also reacts predictably. I find him having a Hoosier lunch of ham and beans with cornbread at the Green Door. He looks up as I pull out a chair at his table and says, "So help me, if you start in on how terrible it is about Fletcher Stout, I'll slug you. That's all I've heard all morning."

"Then you disagree?"

"I don't necessarily disagree, I'm just sick of hearing about it. How many people did you hear talking about the murders the other night?"

"You didn't expect anything different, did you? One is acceptable, one isn't. Murder at

the country club isn't looked on as being the same as murder at the town club."

For a moment he looks puzzled, then he grins. "That's pretty good. You ought to use that in your column. Compare the reactions, and don't forget to say that after Stout was killed the police dumped the town club murders in the bottom desk drawer."

It isn't a bad idea. After thinking it over I decide to follow up on it, and I try to recall another of Driscoll's suggestions I have ever put to use. None comes to mind.

There are times when a newspaperman, particularly a columnist, can judge the quality of his work by the number of people he has made angry, and who those people are. Using that as a criterion, Driscoll's idea was sensational. The *News-Banner* has been on the street no more than two hours the following afternoon when Granger stalks into the newsroom, livid. The people of authority at the police department, particularly Greg Staley, reacted with fury to my suggestion that Stout's murder is receiving more attention than the others. Although he had nothing to do with it, Granger bore the brunt of their wrath because he was handy. He passes it along to me in a way that

leaves little doubt he sides with them.

I have hit on the truth, but Staley and the others do not see it as the truth. Perhaps they do deep in their subconscious thoughts but will not allow the realization to surface. But when I leave the building and see a uniformed patrolman I know, he winks and says, "Goring the right oxen again, huh, Hal?"

Of course Driscoll is elated when I join him at Horner's. Jake Richards, who has been city editor longer than the two of us together have been in the business, listens without comment as we discuss the reaction to the column. He sits bent over the table because years of bending over a desk reading copy have rounded his thin shoulders and given him a stoop that never goes away. A stranger seeing the frayed coat two sizes too large that hangs on him like something a farmer might drape over a scarecrow, the watery gray eyes that shine now after several beers, the outdated necktie twisted to one side of his collar, probably would put Jake down as a man of little consequence. That stranger would be wrong.

When Driscoll and I quiet down, Jake settles his eyes on me and says, "Mind you, Hal, I'm not saying you're wrong. In fact, I know you're right, and it's a thing that needs pointing

out now and then. But don't forget—and this goes for you, too, Grady—that along with calling attention to a thing we may know isn't right, it's our job to tell people all we can about what it is that interests them. Right now they're interested in the murder of Fletcher Stout more than anything else, and don't think the police aren't aware of that, whether anyone down at the City Hall will admit it or not. So you might say they're doing the same thing we are, giving the people what they want."

I get as far as, "I know, Jake, but—" before he raises a hand for silence.

"What you're going to say, Hal, is that it still isn't right and the murders of a couple of obscure people are just as important as the murder of a prominent citizen at the front door of the country club. And you're right, your town club murders as you called them are every bit as important. And it's funny but I've seen it before and it could be that way in this case that over the long haul they'll have a lot greater effect on people and on the town than the other one. But right now that doesn't change things, so we're going to keep playing the Stout murder and the police are going to keep concentrating their efforts on it. Nothing's going to alter that."

He's right, but then he nearly always is. Driscoll knows it, too, and neither of us says anything. Jake finishes his beer and gets up, mumbling something about going home and fixing supper, then going to bed. I know he's usually in bed at his apartment by seven because he's out on the street at three in the morning. But sometimes when I look at his frail body I wonder if he really bothers about the supper he is always going to fix.

Driscoll sits quietly after Jake has gone, a dour expression on his face. Then he nods determinedly and turns to me, suddenly alert again. "Let's see what we can dig up on your town club murders," he says.

I return his stare, but mine lacks his enthusiasm. "Such as what, Grady? And then what will we do with it?"

He shrugs away my questions. "Let's talk to the widow and widower, see where it leads us."

"I know exactly where it will lead us and it's not where I want to go. I'm going to drive out to The Bird and treat myself to the biggest steak in the place, a carafe of burgundy, then a cognac or maybe two, and the longest, fattest Garcia and Vega I can lay hands on."

"Fine, it's right on the way," he replies, pushing his chair back and standing up. "I'll drive,

but we'll hold off on the cognac till later."

"Now wait a minute, Grady," I protest, but he is halfway to the door so I sigh and reluctantly follow.

The meal is not at all what I had in mind. Driscoll talks constantly, getting more and more wound up as he goes along. As usual he gulps his food, then watches every forkful on its way to my mouth, checking his watch between bites. Before I can finish chewing the last one, he is ushering me out the door. We cut south on Batavia, cross the tracks, and within five minutes have parked in front of the Widow Collins' house on West Eighth in the part of town they call Avondale.

If Hettie Collins feels any joy at seeing us, she does a remarkable job of concealing it. Her first words are, "that paper of yours was all wrong about them things you said about Red. He hadn't been meetin' no woman regular like it said, especially that one. I have a good mind to—"

"You knew Roberta Dillard?" Driscoll interjects.

She makes a contemptuous sound. "No, I never knowed her. What give you that idea?"

"The way you said it—"

"I meant Red never had no truck with that kinda woman. He had what he wanted right here at home."

"Uh, Mrs. Collins," I say after seeing the neighbor to the right come out to sweep the nearest side of her porch, "why don't we step inside for a minute so you can tell us a little about your husband. How did he spend his free time?"

She stands aside and motions with her head. Without bothering to offer us chairs she says, "Red never really had no free time. When he wasn't workin' he was busy with union business. 'Course he bowled and went fishin' some, things like that, and had a beer with the boys now and then. Not our boys, I mean the guys he worked with."

"Did he have any enemies?" Driscoll asks, then gets the customary answer, of course.

"Who were his closest friends?" I ask her.

She gives a little shrug, turning the ends of her mouth down at the same time in a way that doesn't do a thing for her looks, which aren't too hot to begin with. A hairdresser, a little less makeup, losing thirty pounds wouldn't hurt her a bit. She thinks about my question a moment, then says, "Prit near everybody Red worked with was his friend, and lotsa others, too. I guess you could say Ed Du-bravitz and Tommy Cline was his bes' friends, though."

We don't stay long, and when we are cramped into Driscoll's

old VW beetle again I say, "Well, are you satisfied? Can you tell me one thing we learned from that?"

He turns a scathing look on me and shifts gears violently. "What were you expecting, that she'd tell us the name of the killer?"

Across town on the far east side of Midland is a neighborhood of small frame houses the developer had the audacity to label ranch-style. Standard equipment at each is four kids, two dogs, a pickup truck, at least one car that hasn't run for more than a year, and a couple that have but shouldn't. Running north and south the blocks seem endless because the developer didn't want to use land for anything that wouldn't put money in his pocket. In the middle of one of them is the house Roberta Dillard won't be coming back to any more.

Fred Dillard is doubled under the raised hood of the inevitable pickup, parked inside a lighted garage because darkness has settled quickly. He straightens up at our footsteps, a bear of a man although no more than five ten. His arms and chest, exposed by an unbuttoned flannel shirt, are covered with black hair that matches an unruly shock half covering his ears and almost meeting a pair of shaggy eyebrows. He scowls at us and

says, "Wha'd'ya want?"

I tell him who we are before Driscoll can say something antagonizing, then ask, "Can we talk to you a minute about your wife?"

"What about her?" he growls from deep in his diaphragm.

"Any idea who killed her?" Driscoll asks without giving me a chance to lead up to it gently.

"No. Why should I?"

"Well, what we've heard is—"

I dig an elbow into Driscoll's side and say, "What we've heard is that in cases like this an ex-husband or old boyfriend often is involved. Did Roberta have any contacts like that?"

"You mean they come knockin' on the door invitin' themselves to supper, no. How do I know what she done when I ain't around?"

"Any ideas at all about what happened?"

He taps the long crescent wrench in his hand against the other palm. "Why don't you just come out and ask if I done it?"

"Did you?" asks Driscoll.

"No," he answers, his voice surprisingly subdued. "No matter what ya heard, Bertie was okay." He stares down at the floor a few seconds, and when he raises his head, moisture glistens in his eyes. Even more quietly he says, "I loved that woman." Then in more of a growl again, "I don't have no idea what happened and maybe

it's just as well I don't."

I murmur an apology for disturbing him and lead Driscoll away, convinced we will learn nothing. Back in the car I say, "He didn't do it and he didn't get somebody else to do it. Scratch that thought."

A nod is Driscoll's only reply. When we are back on East Jackson headed for town, he says, "Let's talk to Molinari next."

"Grady, the one I want to talk to next is the bartender at the Delaware. Who the devil is Molinari, anyway?"

"The ex-husband. Her first ex."

I sigh quietly, wishing I had driven. But the Molinari house on Beacon Street is dark and my spirits lift until Driscoll says, "We'll try Beckett."

"I suppose Beckett is the second ex-husband. Grady, how do you remember these people and where they live?"

"Looked 'em up and wrote 'em down."

"When?"

"At Horner's before you came in. I figured we'd do some checking."

I scrunch as far down in the seat as I can, sighing again.

Lights blaze in the Beckett house on Royale, a street in the northwest part of town. As I grudgingly twist my way out of the underdeveloped car, Driscoll says, "Either this guy has

come up in the world since he dumped Roberta or she took a big step downward."

I think of several reasons why he could be wrong but forget about them when the front door opens before we get to it. A tall man in a white shirt with sleeves rolled once and necktie loose at the collar is highlighted by the light behind him. He says, "Hi, I'm Bob Beckett," grinning broadly as he says it.

The affability seems premature, and I wonder if he's running for public office. But in Indiana "Hi" means "How are you?" and the correct response is "Fine" so I say, "Fine. We're from the *News-Banner*. This is Grady Driscoll and I'm Hal—"

"I know who you are. Recognized you from the picture every night." He swings the storm door aside and motions us in. "What can I do for you? How about a cuppa coffee or a drink?"

Driscoll and I look at each other, then shake our heads in unison. The man has to know why we're here, I think to myself, so why the old-buddy routine? He even anticipates that question, although I wasn't going to ask it, and says, "It's about Roberta, isn't it? A real tragedy. I'm all cut up about it. Greg Staley was out yesterday talking about it."

"You know Lieutenant Staley, do you?" Driscoll asks, as turned off as I am by Beckett's charm.

"No, not before yesterday. A nice guy. Sharp. Real sharp. But you want to know my thoughts on Roberta's death, right?"

"Right, and—"

"I have no idea who would want to kill her. In fact I'm certain in my own mind that the man was the target and Roberta was the innocent victim."

"From what we hear she wasn't so innocent," Driscoll says.

Beckett smiles magnanimously. "Come now, gentlemen, are any of us really in a position to judge the actions of another? Roberta may have had her faults, but who doesn't?"

"Then why did you divorce her?" I ask.

"Divorce her?" he says, raising his eyebrows. "I didn't divorce her, she divorced me."

When we are back in the car I say, "Chalk one up for Roberta. Anybody'd divorce a guy like that couldn't have been all bad."

Driscoll sits without moving for a moment, then starts the engine. "Amen. Buddy, we need a drink after that. Let's head back to Horner's."

I sigh again, contentedly this time. "No. Make it the hotel."

The usual crowd has gathered for morning coffee at the Backstage Bar. Only Driscoll is missing.

I am curious about his absence but don't say anything. Granger announces that the police are close to making an arrest in the Stout case but chooses to remain secretive concerning details. Gloria Thompson is cheerful again after nearly a month of lamenting the opening of the schools. Now the initial crises are past, a routine has been established, her beat is under control, and she has remembered how to smile.

She has grown impatient with Granger's heavy-handedness, the smugness he doesn't attempt to hide because his beat makes him privy to information unknown to the rest of us. She uses a small mirror in applying fresh lipstick, makes a smacking sound when satisfied with the result, then says, "I hear Fletcher Stout wasn't as goody-goody as he pretended to be."

Granger casts a skeptical glance in her direction but I say, "What have you heard?"

"That he wasn't above a little playing around on the side. Only with women in his own circle, though, not with us commoners. I understand he scored pretty well with the country club gals, including the wives of some of his so-called best friends."

"Where did you hear that?" Granger asks, scowling at her.

She makes a pixieish face

and says, "I have my sources," then gets up and walks out, leaving Granger glaring after her. I wonder for a while if she's really heard anything or was just baiting him, but don't come to a conclusion.

I linger on after the others, not ready to start on a column but without anything else in mind for the morning. While I'm contemplating a fourth cup of coffee, Driscoll bursts in the front door as he always does, making heads turn to see if someone is in pursuit. He has a self-satisfied look and there is the usual air of excitement about him.

"Where have you been?" I ask.

"It's my day off, remember?"

"Why would I?"

"Let's get rolling, and wait'll you hear what I've come up with."

"What do you mean, get rolling?"

"We've got people to check out. And get this, Roberta Dillard had another boyfriend along with Collins. His name's Lee Tierney and he worked on the loading dock with Collins."

I motion to the waitress and hold up my cup, determined not to rush into the street with him. As she refills mine and pours a fresh cup for Driscoll I ask, "Where did you find this out?"

"From Molinari."

"Let's see, Molinari is the

first ex-husband, right? So how did you happen to be talking to him?"

"I went out to the house early, before he left for work. He's a clerk in the shipping office at the wire mill, and that's how Roberta got to know both Collins and Tierney. She'd stop by to see him at work once in a while, something about child support."

I shift around in my chair, trying to get rid of the heartburn that has come on suddenly. When it eases I say, "That's some place out there. More action than any singles bar in town."

Driscoll gulps his coffee in three swallows. "Molinari looks clean to me. Remarried and has two kids by the second wife. Swears the only times he's seen Roberta since the divorce were about child support. Guess she was always after him for something extra."

"So he says so, that doesn't make it true. By the way, I looked up Beckett in the city directory. Mr. Wonderful sells real estate."

"Forget him," Driscoll says assertively. "Molinari, too. Neither of them had anything to do with it."

"You know that for sure, do you?"

He nods and says, "Let's go, we've got a lot of ground to cover."

"Don't forget I've got a column to write. Where are we going, to the wire mill?"

"Not yet. We're going to see Tommy Cline." He sees my puzzled look and adds, "One of the friends Mrs. Collins told us about."

Cline is daytime bartender at a place called Stretch's Tavern far out on East Main. I don't bother asking Driscoll how he tracked him down. A few men I assume are part of Midland's growing number of unemployed sit scattered around the long and dark room, drinking beer in heavy-hearted solitude.

The man we have come to see is about forty, heavy around the waist and jowls, friendly enough but not really communicative. Short answers to questions tell us little we didn't already know. Cline has kind words for Collins but doesn't portray him as the saint his wife described. The police have not talked to him, however. Perhaps Mrs. Collins neglected to tell them about Tommy Cline, or they may not have gotten to him yet.

I decide we are wasting time and by way of parting say, "So you can't think of anyone with a reason to kill Collins? He didn't have any enemies?"

Cline begins wiping the bar mechanically, looking up and down it to see if anyone is within hearing. Satisfied no one is, he says, "Red didn't have

what you would call enemies but sometimes there was trouble with people at work. Union business mostly. He was a steward and you know how the boys sometimes get heated up over things. Once in a while they get to arguing in here, and Red was never one to sit on the sidelines. He took the union very seriously."

"Who specifically did he have trouble with?"

Cline rubs his jaw contemplatively, then laughs tersely. "If you call that trouble, just about everybody at the mill, one time or another. You know how it gets when they're heated up. It's not exactly a meeting of the board of directors, but I don't think you could call it trouble."

"So you can't think of anyone in particular he didn't get along with?" I ask.

"No, but I'm not really part of it, understand. Why don't you ask Ed Dubravitz? He and Red were buddies and worked together out on the dock."

Driscoll says, "That's where we're headed," and starts for the door.

The wire mill is a collection of shabby brick buildings, most dating back to the turn of the century. It stands close to the river and is enclosed by a high link fence with rusted barbed wire on top. Not a good advertisement for the product, I think

to myself, although not certain they manufacture it. How we will get to the loading dock concerns me. It turns out, though, that no one pays attention to our presence, and we have the run of the place.

The first person we ask points out Dubravitz as a rangy but muscular man in navy stocking cap and flannel shirt at the far end of the dock. When we introduce ourselves, he turns on a broad smile, revealing perfect rows of sparkling teeth, and gives each of us a bone-crushing handshake. But there is an almost mocking glint to his eyes, a look I can't quite fathom, and I decide he isn't a man I would care to tangle with.

Dubravitz leads us to a secluded spot a short distance inside the building, cocks one leg over a packing case, then answers our questions in precise phrases that indicate he hasn't spent his entire life at manual labor. He strikes me as an enigma, a man who would interest me even had we met under other circumstances and one whose background I would like to know more about.

After the usual preliminaries Driscoll asks, "Who do you know that might have had a reason to kill Collins?"

"A reason or a desire?"

"Either or both."

"Then you think it was Red the killer was after?"

"We don't know," I tell him. "What do you think?"

"From what I've read in the papers and heard around, I would have bet on the woman. But a lot of people didn't like Red. He was abrasive and could be bullheaded once his mind was made up. If somebody had picked up a crowbar on the dock and done the job, that I could understand. But what happened wasn't a flash of anger, it was cold-blooded, calculated well in advance. Whoever did it had plenty of opportunities to change his mind along the way."

"Know anyone with the personality to fit?" Driscoll asks.

Dubravitz stares out over the dock for a moment to where a large truck is maneuvering for position. He grins, or smirks, because the driver has all but jackknifed the rig. Then he turns back to us and says, "Check Vic Russo."

"Who's Vic Russo?" I ask.

"He worked here a few years but was fired two months ago for drinking on the job. Red was his steward so he wanted him to intervene. Russo thought the union should get his job back, but Red didn't agree."

"And they fought?" I ask.

"They didn't fight, not physically, but some hot words were exchanged a few times. Russo would wait outside the gate at quitting time and they'd go at it. The last time he told Red

he'd get him, but that was six weeks ago and to my knowledge they didn't see each other after that."

"So what makes you think it might have been him?"

"His nature," Dubravitz replies. "Russo is your classic loner. A brooding, taciturn man."

"What about Lee Tierney?" asks Driscoll.

Dubravitz stares at him a second or two, then puts his head back and laughs. "Who told you about Tierney? Tierney is a big, not-too-bright guy who is gentle as a pup and practically worshipped Red because Red was good to him. Tierney is the one person I know who you can cross off your list and be sure you're not making a mistake."

"I heard he ran around with Roberta Dillard; too."

Dubravitz laughs again. "Tierney? Once, and that was all; he met her in the parking lot across the street because Red was tied up and asked him to. Tierney drove her to Stretch's to wait for Red and somebody saw them and jumped to the wrong conclusion." He motions with his head toward the office where Molinari has his desk. "And I'll bet I can tell you who it was."

"Have you told the police about Russo?" I ask.

"The police haven't talked to

me. They were out here the day after and talked to a few people, but not me." He looks at his watch and says, "I've got to get back to work."

We thank him and start to walk away but he calls after us. "You forgot to ask me one question," he says, flashing his white teeth again.

"What's that?" I ask.

"Where I was the night of the murders."

He turns away without saying more, but in doing so rolls his cap down so it is a navy blue ski mask with a single white stripe. Although I can't see his face, I can visualize the smirk.

It is after eleven, the morning has slipped away. Knowing I have a column to write, Driscoll points the snout of his ugly little car toward town and we ride a few blocks without either of us speaking. Then Driscoll says, "That Dubravitz is a strange bird."

"An intriguing one, I'd call him. I'd like to know more about him. Who he really is, what he did before the loading dock."

"Think he might have killed his buddy?"

"It wasn't his style. He would have done it when he and Collins were alone somewhere. With provocation I think he'd kill, but it would be a personal thing with him and he wouldn't involve anyone else. That's my

opinion, anyway."

Driscoll mulls it over, then says, "Agreed. We'd better look up this Russo. Meet me at Horner's about two."

Isense the excitement when I walk into the newsroom. Everyone is busy, so I stop at Jake's desk. "What's going on?" I ask but he doesn't look up from the copy he's reading on a screen, just waves a hand and tells me to go do something.

Gloria has been watching and now she grins, so I go to her desk and repeat the question. "They arrested Stout's killer," she replies.

"That's what I figured. Who is it?"

"Remember that little auto parts store that used to be out on Granville, the one that never had much in it? The owner, a man named Hastings, he killed Stout."

"Why?"

"He blamed Stout when the business went under. He thinks Stout was responsible for his loan application's being turned down."

"Doesn't seem like much of a motive. Things like that happen every day."

"Yes, but this Hastings has been a hothead all his life. I don't know any of the details, though, so you'll have to ask Granger or wait till the paper comes out."

She goes back to whatever it is she's writing, but I have learned as much as I need to know. I comprehend it but don't understand it. Had it been a jealous husband as Gloria hinted earlier, it still would make no real sense, but this seems preposterous. Of course, deliberately making a bad situation worse always is.

Fortunately I have several letters that will help me hack out a frivolous column, the kind readers seem to enjoy more than something with a little meat to it. At times that is the most discouraging feature of the business. Now, however, I am glad to do a fluff piece that can be gotten out of the way quickly and requires little thought or effort.

I arrive at Horner's well before the appointed time but find Driscoll waiting impatiently. He has come up with a little information on Vic Russo, including his address and, although I can't at first imagine how he knows, the fact that the police plan to question him later in the afternoon. I ask and he tells me he had lunch with Greg Staley. As a result he also learned all the details of the arrest in the Stout case and passes them along while watching me hurry through a bowl of chili.

I insist on driving this time. Once we are headed for Russo's

house in a sparsely settled area in the southwest part of town I say, "Won't Staley be teed off when he finds out you've jumped in ahead of him? He's already mad at me, you know."

Driscoll shrugs. "He didn't tell me not to. I told him we might drive out that way."

"I imagine he thought you meant after he'd been there."

Driscoll looks at me and grins.

Russo lives in an old frame bungalow, the type popular in the 1920's. It is the only house along a winding unpaved street, a monument to an untimely dream called Prairie View Addition that died aborning on Black Friday in October of 1929. Someone puts in a lot of hours keeping the house and yard immaculate, but it seems a little incongruous, sitting alone as it does among the scrub growth and weeds.

As we pull up, a woman carrying a folded canvas shopping bag descends the five wooden steps from the porch, then walks across the grass to an old Granada parked in the driveway behind an even older Firebird. She dallies when she sees us, obviously a bit suspicious but not wanting to show it. Like the property she is well-preserved. Somehow I feel certain she moved into the house as a little girl when it was brand new and has lived there ever since.

Driscoll is out of the car ahead

of me. By the time I get to where they are standing he has turned and headed toward the house. The woman smiles tentatively and I return it the same way, then follow Driscoll. She has aroused my curiosity so while Driscoll pounds on the door I watch her drive away, then ask him if he found out who she is. "Russo's mother," he replies just before the door opens.

Vic Russo carries muscle on his five ten frame, but his complexion is pasty and dark pouches hang loosely below pale eyes that size us up with unconcealed distrust. He is no more than thirty-five, probably younger than that, and I would bet you could use your fingers and a few toes to count the number of times he has smiled during those years.

He stands motionless and silent as Driscoll tells him who we are and asks if we can talk inside. Then he pushes the screen door open a few inches, turns away, and nods for us to follow. Driscoll raises a brow as our eyes meet and I respond with a shrug, then lead him on through a living room that is the width of the house. It opens only into a dining room separated from it by a wide arch. Russo has continued on down a hall with doors to two bedrooms and a bath standing ajar at the left. The hall ends at a

kitchen with a back porch beyond. Russo has halted beside a round table that occupies most of the space not taken by appliances, cupboards, and a sink.

He nods toward the two chairs at the table, then gets a third for himself from the porch and places it so he sits with his back toward the door. On one shelf of a doorless cupboard to his right is a loaded revolver, a stubby .38 Colt Detective Special. I glance around as unobtrusively as possible and am relieved at not seeing a shotgun.

A half-empty coffee cup is on the table in front of me, and Russo reaches for it, studying me as he does so, then sips from it before saying, "So wha'd'ya want?"

"We hear you didn't get along with Red Collins," I reply, barely getting the words out before he snaps, "So what?"

"So we're looking for his killer," Driscoll says testily. "You seem like a good prospect."

I shudder a little at his abruptness. Russo just stares at him from across the table, but it seems to me the pupils of his eyes are dilating, giving him a predatory look. I want to divert his attention from Driscoll's words so I ask, "What caused the trouble between you and Collins?"

Russo turns slightly so he

faces me. He draws a deep breath, but my question hasn't eased the tension. "He coulda saved my job if he wanted," Russo says, "but he did nothin'."

"What was it all about?" I ask.

The right side of Russo's mouth twists in a sickly grin. "I went down the street and had a beer with a coupla guys."

"When you were supposed to be on the job?"

"Sure. People do it all the time."

"And you took a six-pack back with you?"

"Sure, why not? So they fire me and do nothin' to the other guys. And Collins, instead a actin' like a steward, sits on his can and lets 'em get away with it. He's on the grievance committee and carries a lotta clout, but he does nothin' for me, nothin' at all."

Driscoll leans toward him a little. Russo turns back to face him. Driscoll stares across the table, his eyes two chips of steel-gray flint. "What I don't understand is why you killed the woman. She didn't have anything to do with the trouble between you and Collins."

Russo grins again from one side of his mouth. "She just happened to be there."

Without warning he pushes away from the table, then lifts it upward and shoves at the same time, sending Driscoll

sprawling to the floor. Russo takes a step backward, still wearing the twisted grin, and reaches for the revolver on the sideboard. I sit watching him, too surprised to react.

Driscoll curses under his breath and tries to extricate himself from the tangle of table, chair, and coffee cups. Russo waves the gun at him, backing toward the door at the same time and saying, "Better stay right there, newsie."

When he is past the door, he kicks it shut behind him. Driscoll has managed to get to his feet and starts in pursuit, but I grab him as he goes by. "Hold it, Grady, he's got a gun and he'll use it."

He hesitates, glaring at me, then wrenches his arm free and goes on after Russo. I get up and follow, not in any hurry about it. A car starts in the driveway beside the house, tires squeal, then there is a shot. As I push aside the screen door and step warily out onto the back porch, there is another, and I see Driscoll leaning over the side rail, a gun in his right hand. He draws back just before there is that distinctive crack of a bullet passing closer than I care to hear one.

Surprising me with his agility, Driscoll vaults the railing, landing on his feet in a crouch with the gun in firing position. He squeezes the trigger and

there is the sound of glass shattering, then a car door slamming in the distance. Driscoll runs forward and reluctantly I peer around the corner to see what is happening.

Greg Staley and a detective I recognize as Caproletti are running up the driveway from the street, guns drawn. Driscoll is standing beside the old Firebird and behind the myriad of broken glass that had been the windshield I see Russo slumped over, holding his bleeding right shoulder.

Jake sits opposite me at one of the round tables in the back room of Horner's Tavern, shaking his head and repeating, "I don't see how we're going to handle this, I don't see how we're going to handle this." His eyes are streaked with red, a cigarette burns in the ashtray in front of him, and another is in his hand.

"So what's to handle, Jake?" asks Driscoll. "Let Granger write it like any other police story."

Jake scowls fiercely but Grady just smiles, either not recognizing the danger signs or ignoring them. Jake opens his mouth to reply, then goes into one of his violent coughing spells. When it ends he says, "So what's to handle? Write it like any other police story? A *News-Banner* reporter guns some-

body down instead of doing his job of reporting the facts, and we're supposed to just casually pass over that like it's an everyday occurrence, is that what you're saying?"

"Grady didn't exactly gun him down," I tell him. "They were exchanging shots and he hit Russo in the shoulder."

Jake snorts derisively. "Exchanging shots! Since when is it a reporter's job to exchange shots?"

I turn to Driscoll, suddenly remembering that I have not asked him about the gun. "Why didn't you tell me you were armed? How often do you go around carrying a gun?"

He doesn't answer, just keeps on smiling.

"Grady, I don't like being around people with guns."

Still smiling, he says, "You have the answers to your town club murders, don't you?"

He is right, of course, but I believe I had the answers before the shooting began. Another question comes to mind. "How did Staley happen to show up just at that time?"

"Actually I figured he'd get there a little sooner than he did."

None of his answers satisfies me. Nothing can be done about any of it now, however, so I finish my drink and signal Jack Horner for another. While waiting for it I say, "Strange, isn't it?"

"What's strange?" Driscoll asks.

"The similarities. Except that someone who wasn't the intended victim died in one of them, what real difference was there in the murders?"

Driscoll shrugs uninterestingly. "There's a world of difference in the country club and the town club."

"Is there, really? You believe that, do you?" Jake drains his glass, then bangs it down on the table. "You know what really burns me up about this whole thing? Why is it the two of you usually manage to time your hijinks so *The Morning Sun* gets the first story?"

Driscoll straightens up in his chair, the color rising in his face. "That's not true, Jake. You think about it and . . ."

The rest of whatever he has in mind is lost for me in a sudden, overwhelming desire for the peace and solitude of the old hotel down the street.

FICTION

The Sea Monster Wore Diamonds

by
John H. Dirckx

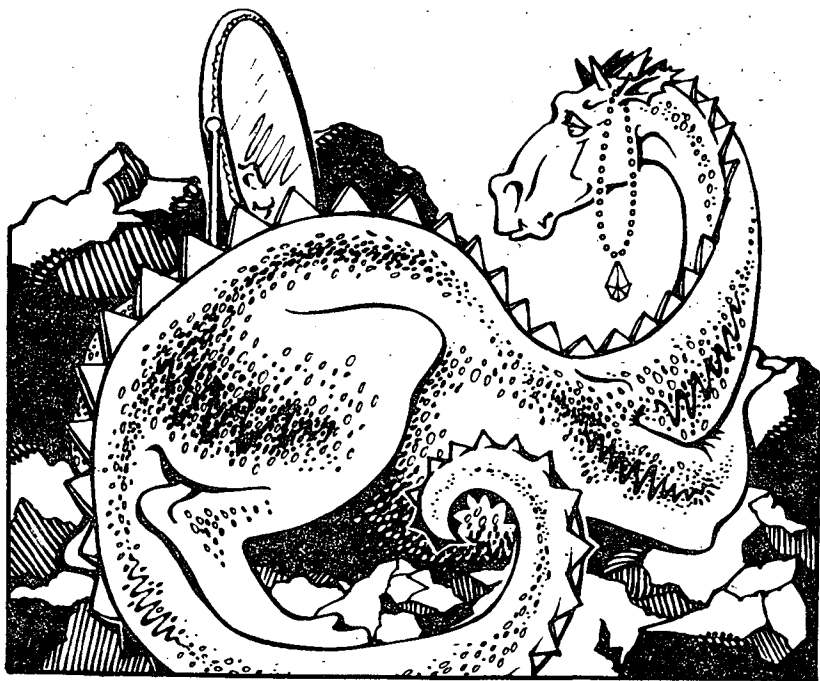


Illustration by Lisa Knouse

If my grandfather hadn't been a sea captain in the old country, I probably would never have become involved in the search for the Fox Point Monster, and I surely wouldn't be encumbered at present with a little black box whose monetary value is exceeded only by its potential for sending me to jail.

I'm a city girl and a landlubber myself, but when I went to Crescent Harbor for a long weekend it seemed only natural to take along my Grandfather Hansen's big brass telescope to look at ships on the horizon, and check out guys on the beach, and whatever.

But the beach was small and dirty and deserted, and the only guys in sight were elderly residents who sat around the boardwalk at tables with umbrellas, playing cards with their wives. After lunch I was sitting there myself studying the picturesque remains of a stone breakwater (the stone pretty thoroughly broken by the water) when a gravelly voice at my shoulder said, "You seem to be mighty interested in Fox Point this afternoon, little lady."

I looked up from my telescope to see a rumpled, paunchy, middle-aged man in a Panama hat staring at me along the barrel of an unlighted cigar. "Is there a law against it?" I asked.

He peered off across the water

and struck a pose. "You talk about law. I've been the law in Crescent Harbor for seventeen years, and I never yet knew an innocent bystander to sit around with a telescope aimed at Fox Point."

"You're a policeman?"

"Chief," he corrected indulgently.

"Nice to meet you. I'm a cop myself. NYPD."

He smiled sourly as he went on chewing his dead cigar into an unsavory-looking pulp. "What are you, Traffic Control?"

I batted my eyelashes and showed him my three hundred and twenty-five dollar gold cap. "Vice," I lied.

"A little out of your jurisdiction, aren't you?"

"Hey, I'm on vacation."

"What's your interest in Fox Point, if you don't mind my asking?"

"I never even heard of Fox Point until this minute. Is that what they call that scrubby little island out there in the harbor?"

His smirk became positively sarcastic. "You ever know of an island being called a point? That's Garden Island. Fox Point is that strip of land that reaches out toward it. And listen, little lady." He laid a heavy and patronizing hand on my shoulder. "They're both off limits to tourists."

I spent maybe another two minutes studying these two weed-grown and uninviting features of local geography, wondering why anybody, tourist or not, would bother to visit them, and then promptly forgot they existed. For a while.

Crescent Harbor was getting on my nerves so I decided to drive to Gleanna, a short mile north along the coast, for a change of scene. Tacked up in a drugstore there I found the front page of a two-week-old newspaper, the *Gleanna Monitor*, containing an article with the headline FOX POINT MONSTER CLAIMS THIRD VICTIM.

The article, written in the breathless and melodramatic style typical of small-town journalists, told how, for the third time in five years, a battered corpse had been washed up on Fox Point by the tide. "Crescent Harbor Police Chief Homer Fordy"—that would be my friend who chewed his cigars instead of smoking them — "discounted rumors of a giant shark or other sea creature, with a lair in an underwater cave near the Point, as 'unfounded and laughable.' Fordy attributes all three deaths to the dangerous tides between Garden Island and Fox Point, but the Adams County coroner's office has yet to rule on the latest death. . . .

"Since the finding of the body

at Fox Point on Thursday, there have been renewed reports of a huge dolphin-like creature swimming in the harbor. Several Crescent Harbor residents queried about these sightings have declined to comment on them."

In contrast, I found Gleanna residents downright voluble on the subject of Crescent Harbor's disqualifications as a tourist attraction. Garden Island, I learned, had once been a show-place with restaurants, dance pavilions, a hundred and forty foot observation tower, and four acres of formal gardens. A ferry crossed the half mile between Fox Point and the island every ten minutes during the tourist season. That was in the twenties. Then the ferry was cap-sized twice in one season by rip tides and seven people drowned. That and the Depression put an end to Garden Island. Did anybody seriously believe in a monster? Probably not.

I drove back to Crescent Harbor and tried to rent a boat. "How long you going to be out, ma'am?"

"Probably a couple of hours. Long enough to row out to Garden Island and back, maybe look around a little out there."

"Cost you two hundred and fifty dollars."

"Hey, I'm a working girl. For two hundred and fifty dollars you could buy a new boat."

"That's just what I've had to do—twice now." He held up two warped, arthritic fingers and shook them in my face. "Two boats completely wrecked—found a week later washed up on the shore."

"What about the people who rented them?"

"Found them, too."

"You're not talking about those people who were supposed to have been attacked by a sea monster, are you?"

He clammed up fast when I said that. I abandoned the boat idea and tried to discuss Crescent Harbor's resident monster with the manager of the Half Moon Hotel. Nothing doing.

I went back to Gleanna and dug up the editor of the *Monitor*, a spry little spinster (Radcliffe, class of '38) who was just brewing some mint tea and would I like some? Yes, she'd written that piece about the Fox Point Monster—wrote everything in the paper except the weather forecast and a couple of syndicated features. She'd written about the last two deaths at Fox Point, too. Would I like to see those pieces?

The first victim, five years back, had been a bachelor on vacation from his job with a power company in Chicago. He hadn't been registered at any local hotel, and no one ever learned how he'd traveled to the coast or what he was doing

when he was killed. His body was badly mutilated, "probably" by the rocks and the tide.

The second victim, who died just a few months later, was a retired policeman from Boston. He'd rented a boat, loaded it with camping gear, and headed for Garden Island. Days later they found his abandoned tent on the island, and soon after that his battered body washed up on Fox Point.

I'd already read about number three, a market research director for an electronics supply firm who'd lived and worked within twenty-five miles of Fox Point most of his life. Late one afternoon he'd rowed off in a rented boat in the direction of Garden Island, as he'd done many times before. This time he didn't row back.

As I reread the report of the first death, my eye was caught and held by an apparently unrelated item in the same issue of the paper. I thanked the charming old relic who'd written it and headed back for Crescent Harbor, firmly convinced that I had a line on the monster.

There's nothing deader than a seaside resort early on Sunday morning. But I hadn't been enjoying the breeze off the harbor for five minutes before Chief Fordy sidled up and helped himself to a chair next to me. "No telescope this morning,

Sergeant Freeling?"

"You've been checking up on me."

"Good thing I did. You told me you were on the Vice Squad. NYPD says you're a detective with the medical examiner's office." He champed at his cold cigar and gazed out over the receding tide. "Funny thing. When I get a vacation I go to New York. When you get a vacation, you come down here. Still claim you're not working?"

"I wasn't when I got here. You got me so curious about Fox Point that I decided to investigate this sea monster of yours."

He scowled. "I knew you were after that. Knew it from the first. You seen any monsters out there in the harbor?"

"The monster isn't in the harbor. It's there." I nodded in the direction of Fox Point. "You can see it now."

He took a long look up the coast, blinked, and looked back at me. "Sorry. Can't see a thing."

"You mean you can't see anything that hasn't been there all along. Chief Fordy, do you remember when China Lazar, the man who stole all those diamonds in Atlantic City, was tracked down and killed here in Crescent Harbor?"

"Do I? The State Police came roaring into town in the middle of the night and cornered him right over there between the

end of the breakwater and the Harbor Lights Restaurant. He tried to shoot his way out. He was dead before I got my shoes on."

"They never found the diamonds, did they?"

He shrugged. "People have been looking for them around here ever since—tourists, insurance investigators, private detectives—but if anybody ever found them, he didn't let on. Lazar was supposed to have had an accomplice, but they never found him, either."

"That jewel robbery was about the same time as the first monster killing, wasn't it?"

"The robbery was right before the Fourth of July, and they found the body right afterwards—five summers ago."

"Ever think there might be a connection?"

"Like what?"

"Like Lazar's accomplice was that first man who got washed up on the Point. He got killed stashing the diamonds, even before Lazar died."

Fordy's eyes narrowed, and he gnawed his cigar with unprecedented ferocity. "Got killed how?"

I pointed up the coast. "See that electric pole out at the tip of Fox Point?"

"Sure. Been there since I was a kid. Used to carry power and phone lines out to Garden Island, but it hasn't had a wire

on it in thirty years."

"That's your sea monster. Lazar's accomplice was a lineman for a power company. He hid the diamonds on top of that rusty old transformer on the pole, in a magnetized steel box. Then he fell off. So did those other two people who figured out where the diamonds were and went up after them in the dark."

I think for a minute he was almost convinced. Then he stopped champing and said, "You're a very smart little lady, Sergeant Freeling, but you're full of beans."

Right then was when I decided not to tell him that I'd

been up that pole myself during the night, and that my theory was fully corroborated by the little black box locked in the trunk of my car. I'd thought Chief Fordy would welcome the opportunity to clear up the town's adverse publicity, but on reflection I saw how bad it would make him look if an outsider walked in and solved the monster mystery in one day.

The trouble is, now, I'm not sure what to do with the diamonds. And after what I told the chief, he could get very curious if he ever finds out that before going into police work I was a telephone lineman myself. Make that lineperson.

Important Notice to Subscribers: All subscription orders and mail regarding subscriptions should be sent to P.O. Box 1932, Marion, O. 43305. For change of address, please advise 6 to 8 weeks before moving. Send us your current mailing label with new address.

KEEP YOUR FRIENDS IN

SUSPENSE

ALL YEAR LONG!

Give **ALFRED HITCHCOCK** this holiday season.

Everyone on your Christmas list who shares your enthusiasm for great mys-

tery reading will welcome a gift subscription to **ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE**.

Each gift recipient gets over 2,000 pages of outstanding detective fiction—in thirteen unique, distinctive Christmas "packages." The first **ALFRED HITCHCOCK** package goes under the tree—along with the gift announcement card we'll sign and send in your name. The others arrive regularly throughout 1984. And each is a reminder of your thoughtfulness, generosity and good taste. This kind of reminder is never too late.

INEXPENSIVE...AND EASY TO GIVE, TOO!

While once-a-year holiday gift rates are in effect, the first **ALFRED HITCHCOCK** subscription costs only \$15.97.

alfred

HITCHCOCK'S

mystery magazine

Each additional gift is even less — just \$12.97

And you can complete

your **ALFRED HITCHCOCK** gift-giving in a *matter of minutes*. Just fill out the adjacent gift order card and we'll take care of all the details. If you prefer, call us with your order toll free: 1-800/247-2160. (In Iowa, call 1-800/362-2860.) Then sit back and wait for the enthusiastic "thank-you's" that will soon be coming your way.

What *won't* soon be coming your way is our bill for your **ALFRED HITCHCOCK** gift order. We'll hold off mailing that until after the holidays.

Even the postage on the order card is prepaid. We want to make this Christmas economical and effortless for you... merry and memorable for everyone on your gift list.

Take a moment *right now* to send us your **ALFRED HITCHCOCK** gift list!

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

FICTION

The Takamoku Joseki

by Sara Paretsky

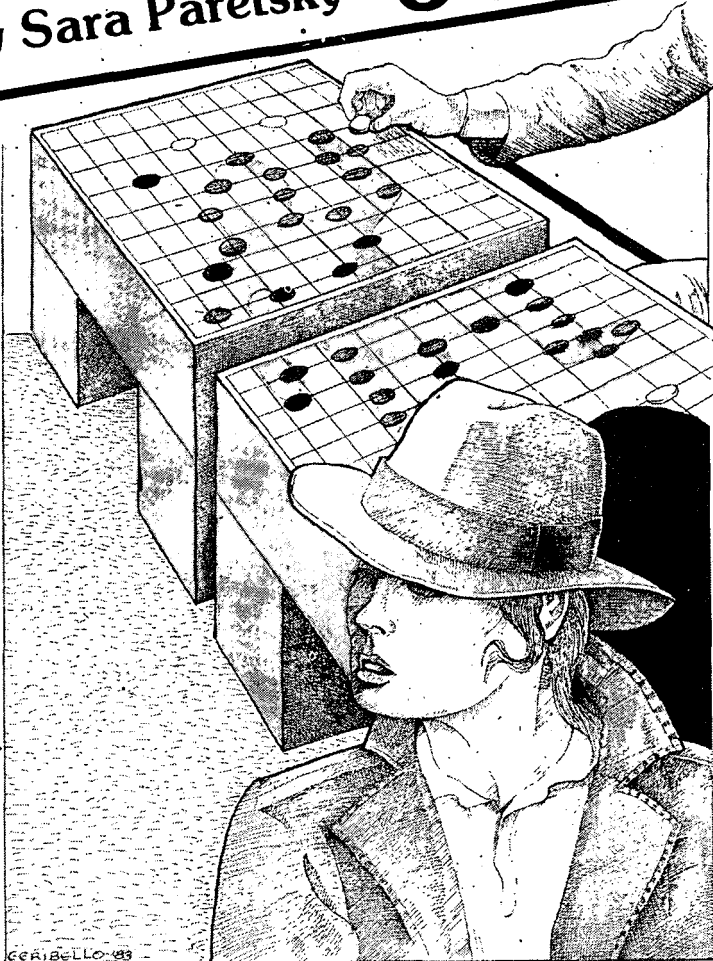


Illustration by Jim Ceribello

Mr. and Mrs. Takamoku were a quiet, hardworking couple. Although they had lived in Chicago since the 1940's, when they were relocated from an Arizona detention camp, they spoke only halting English. Occasionally I ran into Mrs. Takamoku in the foyer of the old three-flat we both lived in on Belmont, or at the corner grocery store. We would exchange a few stilted sentences. She knew I lived alone in my third floor apartment, and she worried about it, although her manners were too perfect for her to come right out and tell me to get myself a husband.

As time passed, I learned about her son Akira and her daughter Yoshio, both professionals living on the West Coast. I always inquired after them, which pleased her.

With great difficulty I got her to understand that I was a private detective. This troubled her; she often wanted to know if I were doing something dangerous, and would shake her head and frown as she asked. I didn't see Mr. Takamoku often. He worked for a printer and usually left long before me in the morning.

Unlike the De Paul students who form an ever-changing collage on the second floor, the Takamokus did little entertaining, or at least little noisy entertaining. Every Sunday afternoon a procession of Orientals came to their apartment, spent a quiet afternoon, and left. One or more Occidentals would join them, incongruous by their height and color. After a while, I recognized the regulars, a tall, bearded white man, and six or seven Japanese and Koreans.

One Sunday evening in late November I was eating sushi and drinking sake in a storefront restaurant on Halsted. The Takamokus came in as I was finishing my first little pot of sake. I smiled and waved at them, and watched with idle amusement as they conferred earnestly, darting glances at me. While they argued, a waitress brought them bowls of noodles and a plate of sushi; they were clearly regular customers with regular tastes.

At last, Mr. Takamoku came over to my table. I invited him and his wife to join me.

"Thank you, thank you," he said in an agony of embarrassment. "We only have question for you, not to disturb you."

"You're not disturbing me. What do you want to know?"

"You are familiar with American customs." That was a statement, not a question. I nodded, wondering what was coming.

"When a guest behaves badly in the house, what does an American do?"

I gave him my full attention. I had no idea what he was asking,

but he would never have brought it up just to be frivolous.

"It depends," I said carefully. "Did they break up your sofa or spill tea?"

Mr. Takamoku looked at me steadily, fishing for a cigarette. Then he shook his head, slowly. "Not as much as breaking furniture. Not as little as tea on sofa. In between."

"I'd give him a second chance."

A slight crease erased itself from Mr. Takamoku's forehead. "A second chance. A very good idea. A second chance."

He went back to his wife and ate his noodles with the noisy appreciation that showed good Japanese manners. I had another pot of sake and finished about the same time as the Takamokus; we left the restaurant together. I topped them by a good five inches, so I slowed my pace to a crawl to keep step with them.

Mrs. Takamoku smiled. "You are familiar with Go?" she asked, giggling nervously.

"I'm not sure," I said cautiously, wondering if they wanted me to conjugate an intransitive irregular verb.

"It's a game. You have time to stop and see?"

"Sure," I agreed, just as Mr. Takamoku broke in with vigorous objections.

I couldn't tell whether he didn't want to inconvenience me or didn't want me intruding. However, Mrs. Takamoku insisted, so I stopped at the first floor and went into the apartment with her.

The living room was almost bare. The lack of furniture drew the eye to a beautiful Japanese doll on a stand in one corner with a bowl of dried flowers in front of her. The only other furnishing was a row of six little tables. They were quite thick and stood low on carved wooden legs. Their tops, about eighteen inches square, were crisscrossed with black lines that formed dozens of little squares. Two covered wooden bowls stood on each table.

"Go-ban," Mrs. Takamoku said, pointing to one of the tables.

I shook my head in incomprehension.

Mr. Takamoku picked up a covered bowl. It was filled with smooth white disks, the size of nickels but much thicker. I held one up and saw beautiful shades and shadows in it.

"Clam shell," Mr. Takamoku said. "They cut, then polish." He picked up a second bowl, filled with black disks. "Shale."

He knelt on a cushion in front of one of the tables and rapidly placed black and white disks on intersections of the lines. A pattern emerged.

"This is Go. Black plays, then white, then black, then white. Each tries to make territory, to make eyes." He showed me an "eye"—a clear space surrounded by black stones. "White cannot play here. Black is safe. Now white must play someplace else."

"I see." I didn't really, but I didn't think it mattered.

"This afternoon, someone knock stones from table, turn upside down, and scrape with knife."

"This table?" I asked, tapping the one he was playing on.

"Yes." He swept the stones off swiftly but carefully, and put them in their little pots. He turned the board over. In the middle was a hole, carved and sanded: The wood was very thick—I suppose the hole gave it resonance.

I knelt beside him and looked. I was probably thirty years younger, but I couldn't tuck my knees under me with his grace and ease: I sat crosslegged. A faint scratch marred the sanded bottom.

"Was he American?"

Mr. and Mrs. Takamoku exchanged a look. "Japanese, but born in America," she said. "Like Akira and Yoshio."

I shook my head. "I don't understand. It's not an American custom." I climbed awkwardly back to my feet. Mr. Takamoku stood with one easy movement. He and Mrs. Takamoku thanked me profusely. I assured them it was nothing and went to bed.

The next Sunday was a cold, gray day with a hint of snow. I sat in my living room in front of the television drinking coffee, dividing my attention between November's income and watching the Bears. Both were equally feeble. I was trying to decide on something friendlier to do when a knock sounded on my door. The outside buzzer hadn't rung. I got up, stacking loose papers on one arm of the chair and balancing the coffee cup on the other.

Through the peephole I could see Mrs. Takamoku. I opened the door. Her wrinkled ivory face was agitated, her eyes dilated. "Oh, good, good, you are here. You must come." She tugged at my hand.

I pulled her gently into the apartment. "What's wrong? Let me get you a drink."

"No, no." She wrung her hands in agitation, repeating that I must come, I must come.

I collected my keys and went down the worn, uncarpeted stairs with her. Her living room was filled with cigarette smoke and a crowd of anxious men. Mr. Takamoku detached himself from the

group and hurried over to his wife and me. He clasped my hand and pumped it up and down.

"Good. Good you came. You are a detective, yes? You will see the police do not arrest Naoe and me."

"What's wrong, Mr. Takamoku?"

"He's dead. He's killed. Naoe and I were in camp during World War. They will arrest us."

"Who's dead?"

He shrugged helplessly. "I don't know name."

I pushed through the group. A white man lay sprawled on the floor. It was hard, given his position, to guess his age. His fair hair was thick and unmarked with gray; he must have been relatively young.

A small dribble of vomit trailed from his clenched teeth. I sniffed at it cautiously. Probably hydrocyanic acid. Not far from his body lay a teacup, a Japanese cup without handles. The contents sprayed out from it like a Rorschach. Without touching it, I sniffed again. The fumes were still discernible.

I got up. "Has anyone left since this happened?"

The tall, bearded Caucasian I'd noticed on previous Sundays looked around and said "no" in an authoritative voice.

"And have you called the police?"

Mrs. Takamoku gave an agitated cry. "No police. No. You are detective. You find murderer yourself."

I shook my head and took her gently by the hand. "If we don't call the police, they will put us all in jail for concealing a murder. You must tell them."

The bearded man said, "I'll do that."

"Who are you?"

"I'm Charles Welland. I'm a physicist at the University of Chicago; but on Sundays I'm a Go player."

"I see . . . I'm V. I. Warshawski. I live upstairs. I'm a private investigator. The police look very dimly on all citizens who don't report murders, but especially on P.I.'s."

Welland went into the dining room, where the Takamokus kept their phone. I told the Takamokus and their guests that no one could leave before the police gave them permission, then followed Welland to make sure he didn't call anyone besides the police, or take the opportunity to get rid of a vial of poison.

The Go players seemed resigned, albeit very nervous. All of them smoked ferociously; the thick air grew bluer. They split into small

groups, five Japanese together, four Koreans in another clump. A lone Chinese fiddled with the stones on one of the Go-bans.

None of them spoke English well enough to give a clear account of how the young man died. When Welland came back, I asked him for a detailed report.

The physicist claimed not to know his name. The dead man had only been coming to the Go club the last month or two.

"Did someone bring him? Or did he just show up one day?"

Welland shrugged. "He just showed up. Word gets around among Go players. I'm sure he told me his name—it just didn't stick. I think he worked for Hansen Electronic, the big computer firm."

I asked if everyone there were regular players. Welland knew all of them by sight, if not by name. They didn't all come every Sunday, but none of the others was a newcomer.

"I see. Okay. What happened today?"

Welland scratched his beard. He had bushy, arched eyebrows that jumped up to punctuate his stronger statements. I thought that was pretty sexy. I pulled my mind back to what he was saying.

"I got here around one thirty. I think three games were in progress. This guy"—he jerked his thumb toward the dead man—"arrived a bit later. He and I played a game. Then Mr. Hito arrived and the two of them had a game. Dr. Han showed up and he and I were playing when the whole thing happened. Mrs. Takamoku sets out tea and snacks. We all wander around and help ourselves. About four, this guy took a swallow of tea, gave a terrible cry, and died."

"Is there anything important about the game they were playing?"

Welland looked at the board. A handful of black and white stones stood on the corner points. He shook his head. "They'd just started. It looks like our dead friend was trying the Takamoku joseki. That's a complicated one—I've never seen it used in actual play before."

"What's that? Anything to do with Mr. Takamoku?"

"The joseki are the beginning moves in the corners. Takamoku is this one"—he pointed at the far side—"where black plays on the five-four point—the point where the fourth and fifth lines intersect. It wasn't named for our host. That's just coincidence."

Sergeant McGonnigal didn't find out much more than I had. A thickset young detective, he has had a lot of experience and treated his frightened audience gently. He was a little less kind to me, demanding roughly why I was there, what my connection with the dead man was, who my client was. It didn't

cheer him up any to hear that I was working for the Takamokus, but he let me stay with them while he questioned them. He sent for a young Korean officer to interrogate the Koreans in the group. Welland, who spoke fluent Japanese, translated the Japanese interviews. Dr. Han, the lone Chinese, struggled along on his own.

McGonnigal learned that the dead man's name was Peter Folger. He learned that people were milling around all the time watching each other play. He also learned that no one paid attention to anything but the game they were playing, or watching.

"The Japanese say the Go player forgets his father's funeral," Welland explained. "It's a game of tremendous concentration."

No one admitted knowing Folger outside the Go club. No one knew how he found out that the Takamokus hosted Go every Sunday.

My clients hovered tensely in the background, convinced that McGonnigal would arrest them at any minute. But they could add nothing to the story. Anyone who wanted to play was welcome at their apartment on Sunday afternoon. Why should he show a credential? If he knew how to play, that was the proof.

McGonnigal pounced on that. Was Folger a good player? Everyone looked around and nodded. Yes, not the best—that was clearly Dr. Han or Mr. Kim, one of the Koreans—but quite good enough. Perhaps first kyu, whatever that was.

After two hours of this, McGonnigal decided he was getting nowhere. Someone in the room must have had a connection with Folger, but we weren't going to find it by questioning the group. We'd have to dig into their backgrounds.

A uniformed man started collecting addresses while McGonnigal went to his car to radio for plainclothes reinforcements. He wanted everyone in the room tailed and wanted to call from a private phone. A useless precaution, I thought: the innocent wouldn't know they were being followed and the guilty would expect it.

McGonnigal returned shortly, his face angry. He had a bland-faced, square-jawed man in tow, Derek Hatfield of the F.B.I. He did computer fraud for them. Our paths had crossed a few times on white-collar crime. I'd found him smart and knowledgeable, but also humorless and overbearing.

"Hello, Derek," I said, without getting up from the cushion I was sitting on. "What brings you here?"

"He had the place under surveillance," McGonnigal said, biting off the words. "He won't tell me who he was looking for."

Derek walked over to Folger's body, covered now with a sheet which he pulled back. He looked at Folger's face and nodded. "I'm going to have to phone my office for instructions."

"Just a minute," McGonnigal said. "You know the guy, right? You tell me what you were watching him for."

Derek raised his eyebrows haughtily. "I'll have to make a call first."

"Don't be an ass, Hatfield," I said. "You think you're impressing us with how mysterious the F.B.I. is, but you're not, really. You know your boss will tell you to cooperate with the city if it's murder. And we might be able to clear this thing up right now, glory for everyone. We knew Folger worked for Hansen Electronic. He wasn't one of your guys working undercover, was he?"

Hatfield glared at me. "I can't answer that."

"Look," I said reasonably. "Either he worked for you and was investigating problems at Hansen, or he worked for them and you suspected he was involved in some kind of fraud. I know there's a lot of talk about Hansen's new Series J computer—was he passing secrets?"

Hatfield put his hands in his pockets and scowled in thought. At last he said to McGonnigal, "Is there someplace we can talk?"

I asked Mrs. Takamoku if we could use her kitchen for a few minutes. Her lips moved nervously, but she took Hatfield and me down the hall. Her apartment was laid out like mine and the kitchens were similar, at least in appliances. Hers was spotless; mine has that lived-in look.

McGonnigal told the uniformed man not to let anyone leave or make any phone calls and followed us.

Hatfield leaned against the back door. I perched on a bar stool next to a high wooden table. McGonnigal stood in the doorway leading down the hall.

"You got someone here named Miyake?" Hatfield asked.

McGonnigal looked through the sheaf of notes in his hand and shook his head.

"Anyone here work for Kawamoto?"

Kawamoto is a big Japanese electronics firm, one of Mitsubishi's peers and a strong rival of Hansen in the mega-computer market.

"Hatfield. Are you trying to tell us that Folger was passing Series J secrets to someone from Kawamoto over the Go boards here?"

Hatfield shifted uncomfortably. "We only got onto it three weeks ago. Folger was just a go-between. We offered him immunity if he

would finger the guy from Kawamoto. He couldn't describe him well enough for us to make a pickup. He was going to shake hands with him or touch him in some way as they left the building."

"The Judas trick," I remarked.

"Huh?" Hatfield looked puzzled.

McGonnigal smiled for the first time that afternoon. "The man I kiss is the one you want. You should've gone to Catholic school, Hatfield."

"Yeah. Anyway, Folger must've told this guy Miyake we were closing in." Hatfield shook his head disgustedly. "Miyake must be part of that group out there, just using an assumed name. We got a tail put on all of them." He straightened up and started back towards the hall.

"How was Folger passing the information?" I asked.

"It was on microdots."

"Stay where you are. I might be able to tell you which one is Miyake without leaving the building."

Of course, both Hatfield and McGonnigal started yelling at me at once. Why was I suppressing evidence, what did I know, they'd have me arrested. "Calm down, boys," I said. "I don't have any evidence. But now that I know the crime, I think I know how the information was passed. I just need to talk to my clients."

Mr. and Mrs Takamoku looked at me anxiously when I came back to the living room. I got them to follow me into the hall. "They're not going to arrest you," I assured them. "But I need to know who turned over the Go board last week. Is he here today?"

They talked briefly in Japanese, then Mr. Takamoku said, "We should not betray guest. But murder is much worse. Man in orange shirt, named Hamai."

Hamai, or Miyake, as Hatfield called him, resisted valiantly. When the police started to put handcuffs on him, he popped another gelatin capsule into his mouth. He was dead almost before they realized what he had done.

Hatfield, impersonal as always, searched his body for the microdot. Hamai had stuck it to his upper lip, where it looked like a mole against his dark skin.

"How did you know?" McGonnigal grumbled, after the bodies had been carted off, and the Takamokus' efforts to turn their life savings over to me successfully averted.

"He turned over a Go board here last week. That troubled my clients enough that they asked me about it. Once I knew we were looking for the transfer of information, it was obvious that Folger had stuck the dot in the hole under the board. Hamai couldn't get at it, so he had to turn the whole board over. Today, Folger must have put it in a more accessible spot."

Hatfield left to make his top-secret report. McGonnigal followed his uniformed men out of the apartment. Welland held the door for me.

"Was his name Hamai or Miyake?" he asked.

"Oh, I think his real name was Hamai—that's what all his identification said. He must have used a false name with Folger. After all, he knew you guys never pay attention to each other's names—you probably wouldn't even notice what Folger called him. If you could figure out who Folger was."

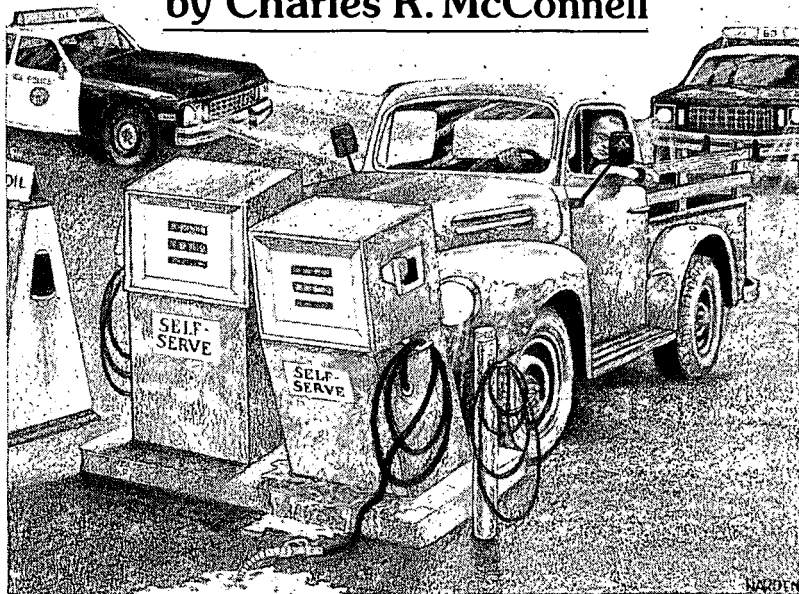
Welland smiled; his bushy eyebrows danced. "How about a drink? I'd like to salute a lady clever enough to solve the Takamoku joseki unaided."

I looked at my watch. Three hours ago I'd been trying to think of something friendlier to do than watch the Bears get pummeled. This sounded like a good bet. I slipped my hand through his arm and went outside with him.

FICTION

The Last Binge

by Charles R. McConnell



“**D**amnit, sheriff, I’ve been threatened five times in less than a week. This nut belongs in jail!” Lon Collinson’s red cheeks pumped as he spat the words around the stub of a black cigar. Drops of sweat gleamed on his bald head.

“This morning I get *this* thing in the mail—” he waved a sheet

of yellow paper at me—“and it says, ‘WON’T IT BE A BEAUTIFUL SIGHT WHEN COLLINSON MOTORS BURNS TO THE GROUND?’ Look at it.”

I had to grab twice at his waving hand to get the paper. The message was hand-lettered. I looked from the note to Zachary Morgan. Morgan looked tired, older than his sixty years,

but a smile spread across his leathery face.

"Me?" he said. "Why would I threaten my old friend and partner?"

"He's a liar," Collinson snapped. "He walked in here as big as day and asked if there was anything interesting in my mail."

Zack shrugged. "I might have made a comment about a pile of junk mail, but I don't rightly remember. I just came to visit." It was barely noon, but I could smell the booze on his breath from six feet away.

I turned to the fourth person in the cluttered office and said, "Did you hear it, Don?"

"No," replied Don Finch. The youthful, solemn Finch was a decent guy. He took a lot of abuse from Collinson and stayed well out of the public eye—understandably, since he was wanted by the law. I doubted that anyone local other than myself knew about the open felony warrant, except perhaps Collinson.

Finch added, "I was out front when Mr. Collinson called and said to send for you."

"Were you told to hold Mr. Morgan until I got here?"

"No."

"I stuck around on my own, Ray," Zack Morgan said. "Mainly I came to pick up my

snowplow blade. Kevin's putting it on."

Collinson's eyes bulged. "My mechanic, on *my* time?"

"On *his* time. I gave him five bucks to do it during his lunch break."

Collinson jammed his dead cigar into an ashtray. "Snowplow, pfah! It's only October."

Zack's smile vanished. "It's part of my truck, the only property I got in my own name outside of a twice-mortgaged house. Unless you care to count a stack of unpaid medical bills and a cemetery space next to Evelyn."

The room fell silent. It was just seven days since Zack's wife had been buried, but four years since they learned she was ill. Four years of doctors and hospitals, with Evelyn refusing to give in until the last while Zack watched her slowly dying.

The quiet was disrupted by the crackle of cellophane as Collinson unwrapped a fresh cigar. He said, "I've got an appointment. I've got to go." He began poking the cigar at my badge. "This is your problem, Havens," he said. "If you like being sheriff, don't forget who damn near controls your party's nominations. I expect protection for me and my property."

"Getting to you, is it, Lon?"

Zack's question had an innocent ring.

Collinson shifted the cigar toward Zack. "Look, Zack, you've been through a lot. But you let Morgan Enterprises go down the tubes, and those businesses are sixty percent mine."

"Gained through unfair advantage," said Zack.

"Unfair, my butt! Good business, that's all. When your lumber mill went under, it would have taken everything else with it if I hadn't bailed you out."

Zack squared his shoulders and straightened with the exaggerated motions of a drunk trying to look sober. "Sure, Lon, you bailed me out, but I've paid some stiff interest. Maybe I haven't been too close to the business, but I've been near enough to know you've been chiseling me."

"You're nuts," growled Collinson. He turned to me. "I want this man kept off my property. You got that?"

I didn't answer. Collinson went to the door. "And I mean he stays away from Morgan Enterprises, too. You may as well hear it now—" the cigar waved at Zack again "—when my auditor gets through, you'll be in jail for embezzlement."

"I'll never go to jail, Lon." Zack's simple words gave me a chill.

"Then get ready to be made out a liar, because in two weeks I'll have all the evidence I'll need. Now stuff that in your truck and get off my property." Collinson stomped from the office and slammed the door.

Morgan looked at me. "I mean it, Ray, I won't go to jail."

"I don't know what Collinson's going to do. But the least you can do is not stir him up."

"Lon's really quite a crook," said Zack. "As sheriff, you ought to know."

That smarted. Like a lot of people, I didn't care for Collinson, but in spite of talk and feelings I never had a shred of evidence against him.

"Zack, I won't judge Collinson. I can't."

"I know you can't, Ray. That's the way you are, and your dad, God rest him, wouldn't have you any other way." His eyes brightened. "But I can judge Collinson, and I *will*."

A brief "ahem" reminded me that Finch was still there. He said, "If you two need to talk I can leave."

Zack waved a hand. "Nope. Got to go. Important afternoon with Charlie Grouch."

Finch asked, "Who?"

I answered, "Charlie Gracci. Owns the Salamander Bar."

"See you boys." Zack looked and sounded like a happy drunk,

but when he reached the door he did it again.

"I mean it, Ray. I know you've got a job to do, but you'll never put me in jail." When he closed the door, I felt he was shutting the door on his life.

"Determined cuss," Finch muttered. He started to leave.

Seen from behind, Don's narrow shoulders made him appear small and vulnerable. I thought about how vulnerable he was in another way, and it took me less than a second to decide to use what I knew. If I had to.

"Talk to you, Don? I need your help."

He turned. "How?"

"Or rather, Zack Morgan needs your help. Maybe I can keep him from doing something foolish, but if Collinson files charges, I may have to arrest him. If he's jailed, it'll kill him—or he'll kill himself."

"Isn't that a little extreme?"

"Maybe, but Zack's been through a lot and I know him. His family was his life, but he lost his boy in the war and now his wife's gone. I'm afraid he doesn't give a damn any more. But he's not himself right now, not the way he's drinking."

"So he drinks. He's got reason."

I said, "Years back Zack Morgan had a reputation as a pow-

erhouse drinker. Not a drop for a year or more at a time, then a two or three day binge. Wild, but never mean. But the binges stopped when Evelyn got sick."

"And?"

"And instead, steady drinking. Half in the bag day and night for four years, and now twice as bad since the funeral. For a week he's been like you just saw him, walking and talking but bombed. And it's more than coincidence that Collinson's being harassed just now."

"You're waltzing around, sheriff. What do you really want?"

"You're the one person with an inside track with Collinson. I want you to help keep the pressure off Zack."

He shook his head. "Collinson signs my paycheck."

I couldn't beat around any longer. I didn't want to threaten him, but I was prepared to do it.

I sucked in my breath and said, "You still have two months before the statute of limitations applies on the Jasonville jewelry robbery."

I felt dirty, but the worst was over. Except for a questioning arch to his eyebrows Finch's expression remained blank, but the color left his face like he'd been kicked.

"I found out when I followed

up an accidental contact a year ago. You were a green, hungry kid and you were suckered. But you're still wanted."

Finch stared at me for nearly a minute. At last the line of his mouth cracked and gloom spread across his face.

"Why didn't you say something before?"

"Because I believe you were conned, and because you've managed to stay decent even though you work for the biggest louse in this county. I'm guessing Collinson knows, too."

Finch nodded. "I was sent to him. He knows, and he's used it. But now I wonder—will you use it? To send me back?"

"I *could*, but I don't want to. I'd rather deal. You help keep Collinson off Zack, and a couple months from now, when you're clean, I'll do what I can to help you out from under Collinson."

"I've been worried about that. I'm not too close to most of his personal business, but I know enough to make me dangerous."

"Like the audit? Is it honest?"

Don shook his head. "No, but Zack isn't clean, either. He milked the business of several thousand dollars."

My stomach sank. "He stole from his own company?"

"Yes and no. He forged some signatures to transfer personal

assets to Collinson. They more than cover what he took. But I think Lon and his auditor—Lon owns the guy—are re-juggling everything except the money Zack took."

Great. I felt all I had managed was to dig a hole for Zack Morgan. I asked, "What would an honest outside audit show?"

"Probably that Collinson has been systematically robbing Zack all the years they've been in business. And evading taxes."

"Can you get an independent audit?"

He frowned. "I don't think so, at least not soon enough to do Morgan any good."

"Work on it. Work on anything that might help keep Collinson away from Zack." I went to the door.

"Sheriff?"

"Yeah?"

"I really will. And thanks."

By the time I reached my office I had decided to watch Zack as closely as possible until a real solution could be found. I called in three deputies—Ben Richards, Greg Michaels, and Tim Kelly.

At seven P.M. the four of us were sitting in a diner across the street from Charlie Gracci's Salamander Bar. Morgan had been in the bar for nearly seven

hours. His battered one-ton pickup, complete with snowplow, was parked beside the tavern.

"So that's where it stands," I said to the deputies. I had told them everything except what I knew about Finch. These men had two things in common: they were completely trustworthy, and they all liked Zack Morgan.

"I imagine some people would consider this a waste of taxpayers' resources—babysitting a drunk. It's true I'm trying to keep him out of trouble, but if he *has* gone over the edge, I've got to keep him from hurting someone."

"Zack's a good man," said Kelly. "I'm with you."

"Thanks. You and I can split up the evenings and give the family men a break on the odd hours."

"For Zack I'll take my proper turn," Richards said.

"Me, too," Michaels added.

"All right, then. Kelly, I'd like you to stick with him the rest of this evening. I'll relieve you at midnight."

There was a Halloween chill in the air when I parked my official car behind Kelly's station wagon across from Zack's house. There were three lights on in the house. Zack's truck was no-

where in sight.

"Quiet evening," Kelly said. "He's all yours."

"Truck still at the Salamander?"

"Uh-huh. He rolled out about half past ten so drunk he couldn't open the door. He walked home."

"Bad shape?"

Kelly frowned. "I don't know. At first I thought I might have to peel him off the sidewalk, but by the time he walked the ten blocks he was moving in straight lines. I don't know what keeps him going."

"Asleep, do you think?"

"Hell, no. He's been moving around since he got home."

"Damn. He ought to get some rest." I hardly got the words out before the two downstairs lights winked out, leaving the only light in the house at the front of the second floor.

"I'll take over now," I said. "Ben will be here at seven."

After Kelly left I repositioned my car so I could see both entrances to Zack's house. Perhaps five minutes passed before the remaining light went out.

I set the two-way radio on low volume, flipped on the dash light, and propped a clipboard of paperwork on the steering wheel.

An hour later I was reading a routine accident report when

my unit number crackled through the radio. I dropped the clipboard and answered, "This is Patrol One. Go ahead."

"This is Patrol Seven, sheriff." Michaels, on duty since eleven.

"Got you. What's up?"

"I'm at the Three-Star Service Station, Broad and Jackson. Hell of a mess—gas pumps all torn out. The building's badly damaged, and there's some gas lying around."

"What happened?"

"Got a witness to part of it. A neighbor heard the racket and got out of bed in time to see a truck ram the front of the building and drive away." Michaels paused, and when he continued, the reluctance in his voice was undeniable. "The witness said it was a dark pickup truck with a snowplow."

My heart sank. I looked at Zack's house. The place was as quiet as an abandoned tomb—and probably just as empty.

I started the car and swung into Zack's driveway, although I didn't for a second believe he was home. The town's trio of Three-Star Service Stations belonged to Morgan Enterprises.

I banged on Zack's side door, then walked around to the back yard where I found part of my answer. The house had an exit

from the basement.

Two minutes and ten blocks later I had the rest of the answer. Zack's truck was gone from the Salamander Bar. With flashers going I drove to the gas station. In addition to the Three-Star Station, the remnants of Morgan Enterprises included an unfinished furniture outlet and a collection of leisure businesses known as the Family Center. If Zack was on a rampage, he had several more targets to choose from.

When I got to the station several people were milling around looking at the destruction. Three firemen were washing down several pools of gasoline from ruptured pumps and torn hoses.

Michaels met me at my car. "Think it's Morgan?"

"I'll be surprised if it isn't. He got out the back of the house and picked up his truck at the Salamander."

The damage was appalling. Six pumps, in two rows of three, had been knocked over, along with four light standards. Glass and bits of metal littered the blacktop, and chunks of black hose lay about like so many dead snakes.

The building had once housed two service bays, but the doors had been panelled over when the station changed to self-service. The panels were

rammed through, and crushed cases of oil seeped onto the blacktop.

Michaels shook his head. "What now?"

"There are at least four other places he might hit. Hell, he could be hitting one right now. You get to the Three-Star on West Avenue. I'll check out Morgan's furniture place." I turned to go.

"Sheriff?"

"Yeah?"

Michaels looked sick. "If it really is Morgan?"

Just then I couldn't have told anyone how much I disliked my job. "He's given us no choice. We take him in."

Once under way, I radioed for the only other unit rolling in the southeast sector of the county. But instead of getting Patrol Nine I got the control operator. "Nine is out of contact, sheriff. Medical emergency, administering first aid and awaiting ambulance."

Just my luck. Any other time the night men would be bored stiff.

Morgan's furniture store was quiet. It was the nearest other Morgan business to the damaged station, so if Zack was going to do something, he could have done it and gone.

I pointed my car east and called Control and said, "Wake

up some deputies or pull from other sectors. I want two more units."

Following Control's acknowledgement, Michaels called. "I'm at the West Avenue Three-Star, sheriff. Peace and quiet."

"Okay. Hang in until I check the other one. If he's going to do anything else, we'll have him covered east and west."

I sped toward Morgan's other self-service station. I was about four minutes too late.

The damage was severe, but not the equal of the other mess. This place was smaller; other than a single island of four pumps there wasn't much except for a little glass cage and a pair of outhouse-sized restrooms.

A young couple hurried toward me as I slid to a stop. When I rolled down my window, the young man said, "I just called. They said you were on the way." He waved a hand at the station and added, "Boy, what a nut!"

"What did you see?"

"All of it," the girl said. Her face was pale.

"We were over there in my car," her companion said, indicating the far side of the street.

"Just drove up and ripped through?"

The youth shook his head. "No. That's why we noticed. He

had keys. He went inside and came out and filled two big cans at one of the pumps. Then he went in again."

"And?"

"Came right out and got in his truck—beat up old thing—and swung around and mowed down the pumps. Then he came around again and smashed the office and took off."

"Which way?"

He pointed. "That way. Left at the fork."

I took their names and said we would contact them later. They backed away and I pressed the gas.

After one block I swung left at the fork, flattened the gas, and added the siren to the flashers. I felt sick. Zack Morgan, drunk, fired with hurt and anger, heading toward his next target in his four-wheel-drive battering ram—carring two cans of gasoline.

The Family Center, built in pieces over twenty years, sprawled across several acres about three miles east of town. It would be shut down this time of night—the two-hundred-seat restaurant, the ice cream parlor and coin-machine arcade, the miniature golf course and driving range, and the Moonlight Drive-In Theater. There was a lot to destroy.

As I left the town behind me I hit the mike button. "Patrol One here. Send any units you can round up to the Family Center on 21 East."

"Got it, sheriff."

I roared up the gradual incline that carried me out of the valley and onto flat land. As I crossed the crest, ahead and to my right a broad, irregular sheet of flame leaped into the night sky. The restaurant was burning.

Before I could flip the mike button again, flame blew out of another part of the structure some thirty feet from the first fire. It shot out horizontally, through the front window, and curled upward over the edge of the roof.

"Control, this is Patrol One. We have a fire at Morgan's Restaurant, Family Center, Route 21 East."

In the few seconds it took me to call, the two fires had nearly joined. Half the building was in flames. As I slowed to turn, a pair of red dots separated from the dancing light. Taillights.

I was going too fast, and when I turned onto the gravel parking area, the rear end got away and I began to slide. I went fifteen yards sideways and lost precious seconds. When I straightened out the lights were a hundred yards ahead.

The lights dropped from sight, vanishing as though switched off.

A few seconds later I had a fire-lit view of the top of the pickup, plow and headlights angled skyward, as it climbed the far bank of the creek that ran through the property. He had ground a path through the miniature golf course and used his four-wheel drive to crawl across the creek.

I slammed on my brakes and swung toward the entrance to the theater. The truck was headed toward the drive-in screen.

The entrance was blocked with a two-section gate of welded pipe secured with a chain and padlock. I eased my car against its center and pushed until I dug holes with the rear wheels and smelled burned rubber. The gate wouldn't give.

I watched the old truck as its full width contacted the right one-fourth of the screen and smashed through, taking a huge bite out of the wooden structure.

There was no quick way to get the gate open, and my car wasn't capable of crossing the creek bed. I got out.

The truck roared over the noise of the fire, and the old machine burst through the left side of the screen. With a chunk

out of each side, the structure looked like a ragged letter "T."

I vaulted the gate and ran toward the screen. The dancing firelight illuminated the truck as it made a U-turn less than a hundred yards from me. It was battered almost beyond belief, and one headlight shone upward at an odd angle.

I could see what he was going to do—one final pass at the screen, dead center, where the structure was thickest. I called out but my words were lost in the roar of the engine, revving like an impatient dragster waiting for the starter's light.

The rear of the truck dug in. Earth showered from beneath the wheels and the vehicle leaped forward. I watched in wonder as the old hulk crashed into the center of the drive-in screen.

The truck blasted into the screen and out of sight. With the crunching and popping of a mighty tree, it fell forward and split up the center over the truck.

I yelled "Zack!" and ran toward the rubble. The remains of the screen looked like a storm-tossed rooftop.

Again the engine groaned, and the heap of broken wood moved. Metal shrieked as the heavy pickup crawled from beneath the wreckage and chugged

toward the rear of the drive-in. Speaker posts popped right and left as they happened to stand in the way, and the truck went through the flimsy rear fence and trundled off into open country.

I sprinted back to my car. Michaels was trying to reach me.

"I'm here. Go ahead."

"I'm going through town, toward the fire. Where am I needed?"

I backed up and swung around as I answered, "Go east on Route 30. He went cross-country, and if he goes straight he should hit 30 somewhere near the hospital. You can get there before I can."

"On the way."

I didn't pause at the restaurant. The place was crawling with firemen, but the building was as good as lost.

I had to backtrack a mile west and go south a half mile to reach Route 30 and go east again. I didn't have to search. As I approached County Hospital I saw the battered truck near the emergency room entrance. Next to it was Michaels' patrol car.

When I stepped inside, Michaels was turning away from a nurse at the registration desk. I asked, "Where is he?"

Michaels jerked his head to-

ward the closed door of a treatment room. "In there with Dr. Cady, getting some cuts patched. He's not going anywhere."

I shook my head. "Man, he really did it."

Michaels didn't have a chance to comment. The outside door banged open and Collinson, red-faced and unkempt, burst into the waiting room. He was followed by Don Finch, as calm as Collinson was agitated.

"Where is he?" Collinson yelled. He started toward me, then noticed the closed door and turned in that direction.

"How the hell did he get here so fast?" Michaels asked.

"Scanner," said Finch. "He monitors police radio."

Collinson barged toward the treatment room. The nurse at the desk said, "Sir, you can't go in there!"

"The hell I can't. I'm on the board of this place!" He slammed through the swinging door. I started after him.

From within the room came an unintelligible howl, followed by a crash and the sound of glass shattering. I hit the door with both hands.

Collinson must have stepped back after entering because the door struck him and knocked him off balance. He fell. His forehead rang against the leg of the treatment table, and he

dropped to the floor like a sack of cement.

Zack sat on the edge of the table. There was a bandage above his right ear and a cut across the bridge of his nose. Dr. Cady stood to one side. Behind the two men a young nurse dabbed at a short, ragged cut on her cheek. The floor was littered with bits of broken glass and blotches of amber liquid.

The doctor peered at the cut on the nurse's face and said, "We'll fix that in a minute."

He bent over Collinson and prodded and listened. When he rose he said, "I think he's all right, but he should stay here tonight. Sheriff, I'm swearing out assault charges against Mr. Collinson."

Zack said, "Attaboy, doc."

"Shut up, Zack," the doctor snapped.

Dr. Cady nodded at Collinson. "He came bursting in here like a madman and grabbed a bottle of antiseptic soap and threw it. Just missed Mr. Morgan, clipped Miss O'Donnell here, and smashed the cabinet."

"The man does have a temper," Zack said.

I took my first hard look at Zack since entering the room. He still looked drunk, but not much worse than nearly fourteen hours earlier. He looked

beat, like he could sleep where he sat. Mostly, however, he looked happy.

"You've had a busy night, Zack," I said. He nodded.

"Why, Zack? Your own businesses?"

"Not mine, really. Not by half."

"Hell, Zack, get your head out of the clouds," I snapped. "Look at the damage you did. You *know* I've got to arrest you."

"Well," said Dr. Cady, "you can't have Mr. Morgan for about three months. Maybe ten weeks, at best, if an arrest still matters then."

"What?"

"Mr. Morgan signed himself into our alcohol detoxification program. That's the same as voluntary commitment to a mental institution, and I'll tell you—and any judge who might issue a court order—that this man is suffering from acute alcoholism and better do something about it *now*."

"Signed up for sure," said Zack, "right after I fixed it to show Lon's a crook. Lots of damage means a big insurance claim, and that means an audit—by the insurance company."

I stared at Zack, trying to read his haggard face. "Figure that out alone?"

He grinned beneath weary, bloodshot eyes. "Like Grandma used to say, a little bird told me. I'm not so dumb, Ray."

"Zack—"

"Enough, enough," the doctor said, "my work is piling up. Sheriff, give me a hand getting Mr. Collinson onto the other table. Then please get your helper and Mr. Finch out of here."

I looked around. Michaels was holding the door open and Finch was looking over Michaels' shoulder.

I helped lift Collinson, then waved Michaels and Finch out of the room and followed them. Michaels said, "That beats anything I've ever heard."

I looked at Finch. I felt I could know this man for fifty years and still have no idea what went on behind that choir-boy face. I asked, "Where do you fit into things tonight, Don?"

"Nowhere much. Mr. Collinson called me when the first station was broken up."

My eyebrows arched in a question that went unanswered. The treatment room door opened and Dr. Cady said, "Mr. Finch, would you come back in for a moment? I need some information about Mr. Collinson." To me the doctor added, "Mr. Morgan's asleep, sheriff."

As I turned from the door, I

saw Tim Kelly standing in the reception area looking my way.

"Thought you'd be asleep, Tim," I said.

"I took a call-in. Busy night—I just brought in a fireman with a broken wrist." He frowned. "Sheriff, who's the man you were talking with when I came in?"

"Donald Finch. He works for Lon Collinson."

"So that's Finch. Heard the name, but I never met him."

"I'm not surprised," I said. "He keeps to himself."

"Not all the time," said Kelly. "I saw him a few hours ago. That's why I asked."

"Where?"

"He went into the Salamander Bar about nine fifteen. Stayed more than an hour and left just ahead of Morgan."

I smiled in spite of myself. Zack's grandma's little bird, all right. A Finch.

Michaels asked, "Does that mean what I think it means?" I'm sure he heard enough at the treatment room door to make him wonder.

"I'm only sure it means that even little birds get thirsty," I said. "Come on, there's still a night's work out there."

I started toward the door. Behind me Kelly said to Michaels, "Now what the hell did he mean by that?"

BOOKED & PRINTED

by Mary Cannon



PETER DICKINSON

Copyright © Fay Godwin

For everyone, January marks the beginning of a new year. For many of us, though, it also signposts the middle of a cold winter, with its dreary accompaniments: snow, slush, sleet, and precious few hours of sunshine in a day.

Those of us with fat pocket-books, few commitments, and a sense of adventure then choose to escape to warmer climes, regions recognizable for their profusion of palm trees and known for their colorful, generous, rum-punch drinks. January brings with it a siren's song to get-away-from-it-all, to escape to exotic locales where one can sample new sensual experiences.

If you can't physically travel to escape winter's doldrums, do not lose heart! There is much geography to explore from a comfortable armchair, and the cost is minimal, while your only passport need be a library card. If you've never read Peter Dickinson's Superintendent Jimmy Pibble mysteries, then I suggest you let Dickinson be your guide this month. I can think of no one better informed to tour you through the geography of human experience.

There have been six James Pibble mysteries, written between 1968 and 1979, and Dickinson continues to add to his long list of children's novels and non-series adult fiction.

He's won the British Crime Writers Association award, and he's been nominated in the U.S. for the Edgar. It's not crucial that you read the books in the order in which they were written, although Pibble—who begins life in *The Glass-Sided Ants' Nest*—does go from the "aging, unglamorous, graying toward retirement" Scotland Yard detective in the first book, to a long-retired, seriously ill old man in *One Foot in the Grave*, which is, to date, the final book in the series.

I won't say too much about Pibble himself, who was so accurately described in the first novel as "more of a herbivore than a carnivore, as detectives go." He is a loner, a self-effacing, middle-class man who's been quietly married to the same good woman for decades. He takes orders without question, which is why he's sent on several assignments that require delicacy and discretion (such as that in *The Old English Peep Show*). Still, he has a reputation for getting his man in the end, and he's considered lucky, so he's also assigned to the "kooky cases" (like that of *The Glass-Sided Ants' Nest*). As a central character, Pibble doesn't inspire great affection or awe, nor does he particularly amuse or delight the reader. But he is a good listener, and keenly ob-

servant, and he easily and surreptitiously melds into the situations in these books, so that Pibble himself is changed throughout the novel, as well as determining the outcome for the other characters and suspects.

And it is suitable that Pibble himself remains just a single element in the background of the books, for it is the backgrounds that are so striking in these novels. Pibble—so sympathetic, so normal—allows the reader to travel those strange, uncharted paths, too, feeling what Pibble feels, and experiencing the twists and turns of the plot just as Pibble himself does. There is a compelling immediacy for the reader in this choice of presentation.

Dickinson has been quoted as saying, "I think of myself as writing science fiction with the science left out." That brings us back to his skills as a tour guide, or geography expert; because what he's referring to is the exotic, other-worldly settings of his books, each so different from the last, each so all-inclusive and separate from everyday reality. All so perfect for the winter-weary armchair traveler.

The Glass-Sided Ants' Nest, for example, has Pibble investigating a murder in a rundown London brownstone. It is unlike any of its neighbors, and Pib-

ble's first step indoors is a trip to another land, because the house is inhabited by a small band of Ku tribesmen, the last of their race, rescued from war-time New Guinea by their missionary's daughter. She is now grown and has her doctorate in anthropology, and it was her inheritance that bought the old house and paid for the tribe to relocate. To investigate the murder of the old chief, Pibble must plunge into the dark ways of a culture totally foreign to him (and to most of his readers).

The Old English Peep Show, in its way, is just as quaint. An apparently routine suicide takes him to Herryngs, a country estate owned by two old British war heroes. The clan members, known for their genetic eccentricity, have taken a daring but dotty step to keep their enormously expensive mansion: they've turned the place into a Disneyland-like adventure park, with imported lions and cuckoos, and a houseful of locals hired to go about their old fashioned business in period costumes. There is, of course, method to this madness, but it's in this madhouse of Merrye Olde England that Pibble must

go about his detecting business.

The Sinful Stones cuts off Pibble—and the reader—from reality in its very setting, too, for it takes place in an unlikely stone fortress on an isolated Hebridean isle; and its inmates include a crotchety old genius-scientist, protected by an odd new religious order of monks (many of them recognizable as ex-cons, old adversaries of the Scotland Yard superintendent). *One Foot in the Grave* isolates Pibble yet again, not only in the confines of the luxurious nursing home where Pibble finds himself; but also in the narrow strictures of his post-stroke physicality. This time it is his own body that imprisons Pibble, and it is a confinement described in appallingly real terms by Dickinson. It is, too, his greatest triumph when the retired CID man rises above his personal battle with aging to solve yet another murder.

So get away this winter, and travel to alien shores. It won't cost you much, and you won't have to worry about whether to drink the water.

(Most of the Pibble novels are available in paperback from Penguin or Pantheon.)

MYSTERY REVIEWS

Dorothy Simpson follows her two earlier Luke Thanet mysteries with a third, **Puppet for a Corpse**, and it's a goodie. For those of you who like British police procedurals, Simpson gives you an

appealing protagonist in *Thanet*, a man concerned about training his junior colleagues and assisting his wife in her new career, as well as finding out why a wealthy, respected doctor with a beautiful, beloved wife would apparently commit suicide. For added spice, the wife is a well known actress, which makes it tricky to know when she's lying; she's also been having an affair with a younger man and she's expecting the doctor's first child—another reason against the theory of suicide. One might guess part of the truth, but I defy anyone to come to the correct conclusion that *Thanet*—at last—comes up with. (Scribner's, \$11.95, 215 pp.)

Ruth Rendell, who was profiled in this column last year, has added to her respectable list of Inspector Reg Wexford novels. **Speaker of Mandarin** (Pantheon, \$12.95, 224 pp.) is the latest, and in it we travel with Reg and a police deputation to steamy China. (Another treat for the armchair traveler!) He's unnerved by a recurring hallucination while overseas, and relieved to find himself back on solid British soil. Too soon, however, he's forced to revisit China—in his memory, at least—when he finds himself investigating the murder of a wealthy woman who shared part of his tour with the rest of the group. I recommend Wexford as a traveling companion this winter.

A Cold Mind by David L. Lindsey may be the best psychological chiller you'll read this winter. An advance quote from Ruth Rendell says "*A Cold Mind* stands alone. It is entirely original." I agree. The hero is Houston's homicide detective Stuart Haydon, and the assignment is to learn why—and how—and *who*—is methodically murdering the city's most beautiful call girls. The style is crisp, tough, and fast-paced, and the details of the investigation (including some gripping medical info) are expertly woven through a tale that is horrible, but not gratuitously so, and irresistibly eerie. Lindsey is literate, his plot imaginative, and his characters quite credible. But don't begin it just before bedtime. (Harper & Row, \$13.95, 311 pp.)

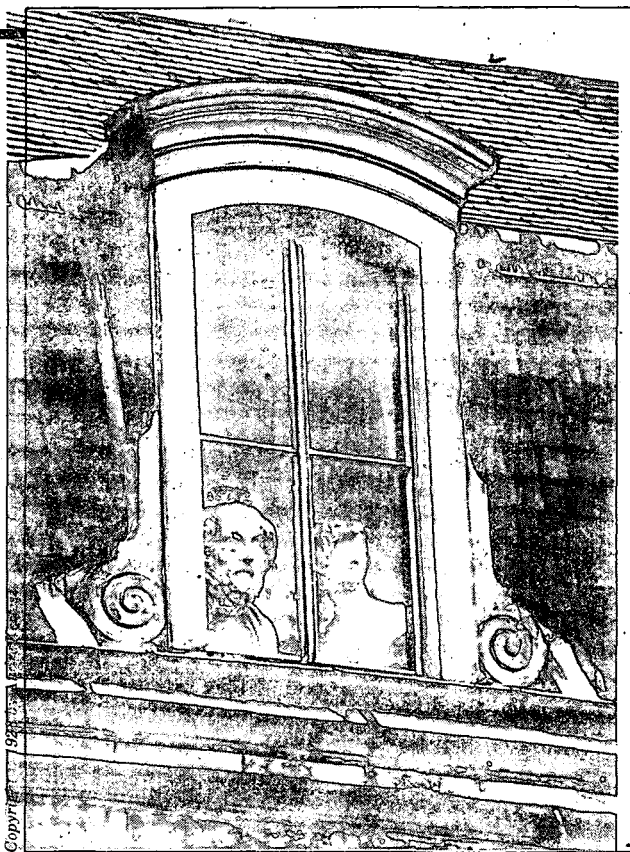
Edward Candy has penned a breezy British mystery with a dash of comedy, a soupçon of romance, and a generous dollop of eccentric characters pulled from the ever-popular pool of British academics. The title, **Bones of Contention**, refers to the opening gambit: the unexpected delivery of an unsolicited skeleton to Mr. Murivance, director of the Museum of Pathological Conditions in Childhood, in London. The poor man's curiosity over the origin of this anonymous gift leads to his death; and his will—with its surprising legacy to a colleague at the college—leads to more mischief. If you

like your mysteries probable, you'll surely find this a bare-bones affair, with a skeleton of a plot, as well as in it. But if you relish the light and zany, and enjoy a book that harkens back to an earlier age, then you'll enjoy this . . . probably. (Doubleday Crime Club, \$11.95, 178 pp.)

A published poet who has also turned a hand to mystery-writing is L.A. Taylor (a pseudonym). The protagonist in **Footnote to Murder** is divorced mother Marge Brock, a stout-hearted lady who makes a meager living as a free-lance researcher. It is in this capacity that she agrees to do some preliminary research on unsolved murders for a writer of true-crime books. She thinks it only coincidence that her library work turns up a series of stranglings that took place in England at the time she and her husband were living there. But all too quickly she unearths a repetition—another series of killings with the same M.O.—and then a third series. And although it's difficult for the sensible Marge to admit, the conclusion becomes unavoidable: someone from her old circle of professors and their families must be a mass murderer. There's plenty of action, some romance, and a few thrills in this, the author's first foray into mystery-writing. (Walker and Company, \$12.95, 180 pp.)

Judgment Day, by Bob Lancaster and B.C. Hall, is a true story as compelling as any in fiction. This is a well-researched and soundly-presented summary of the events on and surrounding July 10, 1981, in the small farming community of Skidmore, Missouri. Central to the tale is the murder of Ken Rex McElroy, who was shot in his parked pickup truck by a sniper, in broad daylight, almost in the center of Skidmore's main street. But that's not why the murder became national news, nor why this book makes such fascinating reading. Ken Rex McElroy's truck had at that moment been almost surrounded by irate townsmen, all of whom silently walked away after the shooting, leaving the body abandoned in the noonday sun. When the police questioned the men, no one admitted to having seen anything. This collective blindness seemed even more suspicious when investigators learned more about McElroy: he was, and had been for years, the town bully, a growing menace, increasingly dangerous to any and all who crossed him—and he never spent time in jail for any of his misdeeds. The question of whodunit isn't answered in *Judgment Day*. But the authors' careful narrative reconstruction of the crime, and their sensitive interviews with many of the major characters in the real-life drama, say a great deal about American justice. (Seaview/Putnam, \$13.95, 188 pp.)

THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH



What might their story be? We will give a prize of \$25 to the person who invents the best mystery story (in 250 words or less), based on the above photograph. The story will be printed in a future issue. Reply to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017.

The winning entry for the September Mysterious Photograph will be found on page 154.

CASES ON FILE

The Legend of Third Creek
by David Braly



Outside the Luxembourg Gardens of Paris on the morning of December 7, 1815, twelve soldiers aimed muskets at their former commander and waited for an order to fire. Their target boldly took four steps toward them, yanked off his hat, and, with his hand over his heart, declared: "Frenchmen, I protest against my condemnation. My honor—" At that moment the major commanding the firing squad yelled "Feu!"; the muskets roared, the smoke rolled, the target collapsed onto his face, and a kneeling priest blessed him.

This, says history, was the end of a cooper's son who had risen through the ranks of Napoleon's army until he became

a marshal, a duke, and finally a prince. Michel Ney, Prince of La Moskova, the sometimes careless but always daring cavalryman who remains even today one of France's greatest heroes, was the warrior whom Napoleon had called "the bravest of the brave."

French soldiers had fought under the man they fondly called "Red Peter" from the west of Europe to the east. He had led them out of Russia after Napoleon abandoned them. When Napoleon escaped from Elba, Ney had told King Louis that he would bring him the emperor "in an iron cage," but like the other veterans, his heart had melted at the sight of his former chief. He had defected,

Above, Marshal Michel Ney

commanded the center at Waterloo, and hid in the south for months after the Bourbon restoration. Eventually he was arrested, court-martialed for treason, and sentenced to death.

According to contemporary reports, one member of the firing squad deliberately aimed high, but eleven musket balls tore into Ney: six into his chest, one into his neck, one through his right arm, and three into his head. His body was taken by a closed carriage the six hundred feet to the Hospice de la Maternité where it was surrendered to his family. When the burial was held the following morning in the Père la Chaise cemetery, his wife did not appear. People wondered why.

A valiant Pole named John Jacob Lehmanowsky had served under Napoleon from the beginning of the latter's career, fighting in Italy, Egypt, Spain, and Russia, rising in rank to colonel, and bearing upon his body numerous wounds including a sabre scar across his face. Lehmanowsky was Ney's aide at Waterloo and afterwards was in prison with him. He, too, was sentenced to death. But Lehmanowsky managed to escape and make his way to America, where he eventually became a schoolmaster and preacher in Indiana.

One day a big man who bore himself like a soldier visited him at his house in Knights-town. Lehmanowsky seemed shocked by the visitor's arrival but, when questioned by his family, refused to tell them who the man was. Finally, years later, just before he died, the old colonel revealed to his daughter: "Man or ghost, as he might be, I knew that the figure before me was none other than Marshal Ney."

Despite Lehmanowsky's solid credentials, there would be ample reason to suspect that he was mistaken, deranged, or attempting to put over a hoax—if other veterans of the Napoleonic Wars had not also claimed to see Ney alive in America.

In 1874, an old Napoleonic veteran living in Dayton, Ohio, Philip Petrie, recounted to a reporter how he left Bordeaux as a seaman aboard a ship that arrived in Charleston, South Carolina, on January 29, 1816. Aboard also was the man he knew from his army days to be Marshal Michel Ney. Petrie said that after the ship arrived he saw "Red Peter" go into a music shop on Broad Street and come out with a flute—the very instrument the marshal had played for years.

Thousands of Napoleon's veterans had fled to America, and

a few more of them reported spotting Marshal Ney. Almost all of these sightings were in the Southeast.

Then, in Statesville, North Carolina, a veteran of Napoleon's army, John Snyder (despite his name, born in Prague), saw a tall, redhaired man, and exclaimed: "Lordy God, Marshal Ney!"

The man he was looking at was a schoolmaster, known to one and all as Peter Stuart Ney.

Peter Ney denied emphatically that he was "Red Peter." He said that his mother was a Scot, and he said it with a heavy Scottish brogue. When Archibald D. Murphey employed Ney to help him transcribe notes for a history of North Carolina, he asked Ney's references if the schoolmaster was in fact the marshal. "He is not a Frenchman," Murphey wrote in 1827, "but a well educated, intelligent Scotsman by Birth, who did not go to the Continent until he was Eighteen . . . he was recommended to me as a relative of Marshal Ney. He tells me that he is not a Relative. He has been a good deal in Service."

Despite Ney's similarity to the marshal in looks and name, despite the veteran's identification of him, he continued to deny that he was the famous

hero. He taught in various communities, was always popular and masterful, and earned the respect of all. Then, at Florence, North Carolina, in 1821, news arrived that Napoleon had died on St. Helena. Ney was shocked; one report says that he fainted. According to some accounts his neighbors and students stayed with him day and night for fear he might take his own life, while other accounts say he actually did try to slash his throat but that the knife broke. All accounts agree upon one fact: after that day, on those rare occasions when Peter Ney was drunk, he said that he was Marshal Ney and talked with incredible familiarity and knowledge of Napoleon and his battles.

Who was this Peter Stuart Ney?

He first appeared, in Charleston, in 1816. Between that time and his move to Rowan County, North Carolina, in 1831, Ney taught school in many different localities in the Carolinas and Virginia. Wherever he went he was respected and influential. At Mocksville, where his intervention prevented a murder on the day of his arrival, he identified himself as a French refugee. While he was teaching in Mecklenburg County, a delegation called

upon him and asked him to design a seal for the newly-established Davidson College. Ney's design and motto were accepted and remain the official seal of that institution. He remained in Mecklenburg, at the house of William Nelson, until his move to Rowan.

In 1831, Ney settled in the house of Osborne Fourd, a few miles south of the Third Creek Presbyterian Church, in Rowan County. He taught school in the church's log Session House until his death. In its textbooks he supposedly wrote corrections in the accounts of Napoleon's campaigns. He also drilled the Rowan militia on the church grounds.

The people of Third Creek, like those of the other communities where he had lived, quickly came to respect this big man with the big intellect and, like those others, wondered who he really was. For, as before, when Ney became drunk, he claimed to be the marshal and spoke familiarly of Napoleon and battles and famous people of the vanquished empire.

If he was truly the marshal, how had he escaped execution?

Several stories of how this was accomplished have surfaced, and although there are differences in detail, the basic facts in each are identical. In-

deed, the story of Michel Ney's escape to America was published by the *Carolina Watchman* in 1836, while Peter Ney still lived.

Allegedly, a conspiracy was formed to rescue the marshal. Ney was given a sack of blood, which he slipped beneath his coat. When the execution squad fired at him, he broke the sack with a blow of his hand, the hand that witnesses reported seeing him bring up to his heart. The muskets of the firing squad had earlier been loaded with blanks. Witnesses reported that when the rifles were fired Ney fell forward gracefully, not at all like a man who had been pierced by eleven musket balls. He was then placed in a coffin and taken to the Hospice de la Maternité, but he left there with the aid of the conspirators and rode to Bordeaux, where he slipped aboard a ship bound for Charleston.

And who was behind all of this activity?

According to some, the Masons. At that time they were a powerful organization, and had in fact been responsible (along with rioting university students) for locking a hundred and fifty thousand of Napoleon's troops in the fortresses and cities of Germany in 1814 when they were desperately

needed by the French to stop the advancing Russian armies. Ney was a Mason, a member of the Paris lodge. The Duke of Wellington was also a Mason. The members of the Paris lodge allegedly appealed to Wellington to save the heroic marshal as a fraternal act. Wellington consented and arranged Ney's escape.

Some people believe that everything was brought about by a beautiful young adventurer who desperately loved the marshal, the actress Ida Saint Elme, who had followed Ney across wartime Europe for years disguised as a boy. In 1828, Ida Saint Elme published her memoirs, which told how she had planned Ney's rescue, but she indicated that the plan had never been implemented and even told how she had watched from a cab his execution by the firing squad. There is suspicion that the plan may have been implemented, and that her saying otherwise was merely a ruse.

Peter Ney himself said that there had been a conspiracy to save him and that it worked only because of the involvement of Wellington. He said that the soldiers in the firing squad—all formerly under his command—had been told to fire over his head. When they did,

he burst a sack of blood concealed inside his coat, fell forward, and pretended to be dead. He was removed to a nearby hospital, and, after a last visit to his wife, rode to Bordeaux where he boarded a ship bound for America. During the voyage a seaman who once had been under his command recognized him. After his arrival in America, said Ney, he spent several years quietly studying advanced mathematics and the classics to equip himself for his newly chosen career, that of a schoolmaster.

The evidence that Peter Ney was Michel Ney was strong. They looked alike, of course, and had the same personalities. Peter Ney was found to have upon his body several war wounds, including a sabre wound on his head, that were identical to those known to have scarred the marshal. Like Michel Ney, Peter Ney was a superb swordsman, and he also was a crack shot with a pistol. Peter Ney spoke fluent French, German, and English, just like the marshal, and he had an intimate knowledge of the Napoleonic Wars.

The evidence that Peter Ney wasn't the marshal is also strong. Although supporters of the claim speak of the marshal's fluency in French and

English, as noted above, those who deny that Peter was "Red Peter" say that the marshal couldn't speak English and that Peter couldn't speak German. Marshal Ney was born in Sarre-Louis, in German territory, and German was his native and preferred language. Peter, say these people, spoke English with a Scottish brogue and never spoke German at all. Moreover, the marshal was a man of very limited education, while Peter was adept at advanced mathematics and could speak Latin and Greek. These doubters say that Peter Ney probably did serve under Napoleon, but as a Scots volunteer in the ranks, and it was mental instability, appearing only when he was drunk, that caused him to claim that he was Michel Ney.

His students said later that they never knew Peter Ney to lie. He was an honest, good, strong, and brilliant man, and they loved him. Certainly he was a popular man in Rowan County. Still, the students wondered who he really was. Everyone in Rowan wondered. Even Osborne Fourd, in whose house Ney lived, wondered.

Thirty-one years after Marshal Ney's presumed execution, Peter Ney lay on his own deathbed. He was reportedly seventy-seven years old. Around

him were gathered several of his friends, including his best friend Dr. Matthew Locke. There is some doubt about who asked Ney the question, Dr. Locke or Dr. B. D. Wood, but one of them did ask it: "Mr. Ney, there is something that has been puzzling us for years. And now we want the truth from your lips. We want to know who you are."

"I will not die with a lie on my lips," said the old schoolmaster. "I am Marshal Ney of France."

Peter Stuart Ney died November 15, 1846, and was buried in the cemetery of the Third Creek Presbyterian Church. Many say that Michel Ney died the same day (he would have been seventy-seven) and lies in the same cemetery. The debate was not buried. It had barely begun.

Rowan County residents have debated the mystery for more than a century. Most, including historians, reportedly believe that Peter Ney and "Red Peter" were the same man.

Complicating the dispute is the story that even Michel Ney wasn't really Michel Ney. According to an article published in the 1840's by an American literary magazine, Michel Ney was in reality a Marylander named Michael Rudolph, a son

of German parents and a veteran of the American Revolutionary War. The U.S. envoy to France, General Pinckney, who knew Rudolph personally, reputedly became convinced that Rudolph was the American he had heard about who was on Napoleon's staff. Some individuals accepted the story as true because the abilities and character of Rudolph and Ney were identical, Ney spoke terrible French, and the French called Ney a "tobacco trader."

I think this story can be quickly refuted. The records of Ney's early life exist and, because he distinguished himself at an early age, are unlikely to have been invented or doctored. Moreover, Rudolph participated in General Anthony Wayne's Indian campaign of 1793, by which time Ney was already five years enrolled in the French Army and only three years short of his promotion to general.

The Peter Stuart Ney claim cannot be dismissed as easily.

Eventually drastic action was decided upon to solve the mystery. Peter Ney's body lay in the Third Creek cemetery, marked by a headstone that his former students had raised money to erect in 1856. It was known that Marshal Ney had a silver plate in his head. Therefore, the

body of Peter Ney would be exhumed in order to examine the skull.

Three hundred spectators, several local physicians, and reporters from New York City, Washington, and Chicago, waited that dark day of May 3, 1887, while several laborers dug into the grave. The crowd pressed close when the body was finally reached. Just then, without warning, a fierce thunder and lightning storm erupted. The gravediggers dropped their shovels and ran away. One of the shovels fell into the grave and crushed the skull of Peter Ney. When doctors J. G. Ramsay and B. D. Wood examined the skeleton, they found that it was five feet ten inches long (an American contemporary had written that Marshal Ney was "about five feet, eight inches"). Unfortunately, the part of the skull that was trepanned in the marshal was missing from the skull of the schoolmaster. There was some indication that the skull might have been trepanned, but because of the missing piece no one could be sure. The skeleton was returned to its grave.

Before it was reinterred, women from Statesville were apprehended trying to walk away with some of the old man's bones as souvenirs. Theirs was

not the first attempt. Shortly after Peter Ney's death, a man arrived in Rowan County, said that he was Marshal Ney's son, and that he had come to claim his father's body. Local citizens persuaded him to let the beloved schoolmaster rest where he was already buried. Possibly this individual wanted the skeleton for public display, it being a common practice at the time to display the bones of famous people for profit.

The descendants of Marshal Ney believe that Peter Ney was an impostor.

New York attorney Henry Hoyt spent large amounts of money prior to his death in 1957 trying to prove that Peter Ney was just that. He eventually concluded that the schoolmaster was one Peter McCnee, born in Fintry Parish, Scotland, in 1787. However, such a birthdate would appear to be too late for Peter Ney. Even if he wasn't the marshal, and thus not necessarily seventy-seven when he died, apparently he looked older than the fifty-nine years such a birthdate would make him.

The French government indignantly insists that the whole dispute is madness, that the great marshal is buried in Paris.

Yet the controversy persists. Peter Ney's poems are collec-

tors' items, and Ney relics are a prized part of the "unique materials" collection at Davidson College. One hundred feet from Ney's grave stands his old schoolhouse, now brick veneered by an organization called the Ney Memorial Association. His grave is enclosed because souvenir seekers had begun to chip away at his headstone and there was a danger of further vandalism. Today the grave is surrounded by a brick structure only slightly taller than the headstone, with a roof above, and low windows on each side for viewers to look into. The words on the gravestone read: "IN MEMORY/ OF/ PETER STEWART NEY/ A native of France/ and soldier of the French Revolution/ under/ NAPOLEON BONA-PARTE/ Who departed this life/ November 15th 1846/ Aged 77 Years."

And then there is that other grave, the one in the Père la Chaise cemetery of Paris. Naturally it would be far more elegant than the resting place of the poor schoolmaster. All French heroes, including those from the same era but of lesser rank, have stately, well-tended graves. And this hero had received an annual stipend of six hundred thousand francs for his services, was the embodiment of all that was boldness,

was the warrior Napoleon had called "the bravest of the brave." However, there is no such magnificence for Marshal Ney; there is not even a simple headstone on his grave.

Is it because the French government knows that the grave is empty?

There are many questions. Most of them concern why Peter Ney didn't behave otherwise than he did if he was truly Michel Ney. Why did he not return to France after time had healed the wounds of war and hatred? Why did he not travel up to Philadelphia where prominent French exiles gathered around the palatial estate of Joseph Bonaparte? Why did he bother to conceal his identity at all? And if he did bother, why change his first name but not his last? Was he, perhaps, held silent by some holy or Masonic oath sworn to in exchange for his life, an oath that still bound him many years after the need for it had passed? An oath required of him originally in order to protect members of the army, or the hospital, or the Paris Masonic lodge—or the

Duke of Wellington?

One of America's leading handwriting experts, David N. Carvalho, was asked to compare the handwriting of Peter Stuart Ney with that of Marshal Michel Ney. He did. And he reported that there was no question that everything he had been shown had been written by the same man. Two other handwriting experts examined samples and reached the same conclusion. When Charleston's Chief of Detectives examined handwriting samples during his own investigation of the mystery in 1936, he too became convinced that Peter Ney and Michel Ney were the same man.

Handwriting samples of Peter Ney and Michel Ney were also shown to four handwriting experts in France. The French experts all reached the same conclusion: the samples were written by two different men.

If this particular mystery is ever solved, the good people of Rowan County, North Carolina, will be in for a great deal of disappointment—or the citizens of France for a terrific national shock.

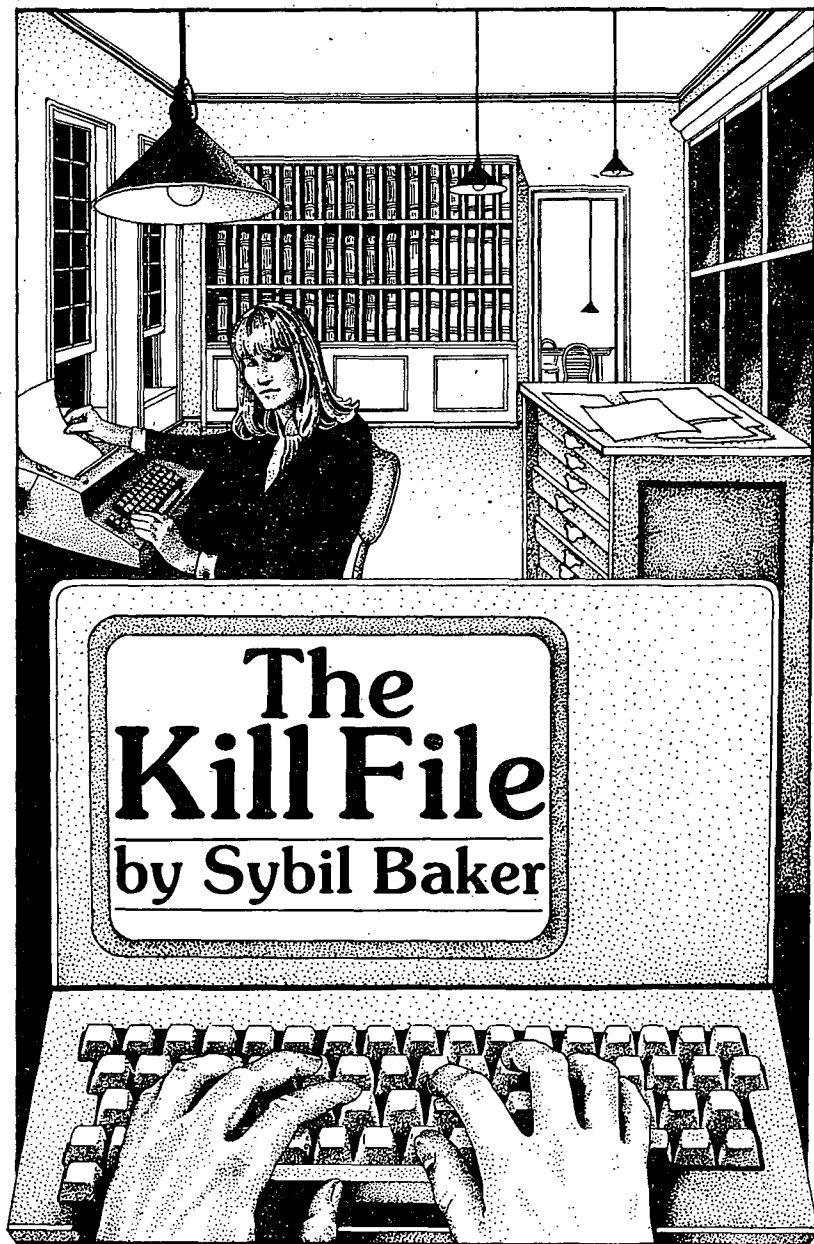


Illustration by Glenn Wolff

The Otter Creek *Gazette* had mysteriously thrived under the management—or lack of management—of its elderly publisher, who grew more feeble and forgetful every day. The weekly newspaper occupied a former mill, a stone building in a small hollow near the creek, reached by a down-sloping lane off Main Street. Slowly, the old publisher would walk down this lane, bordered by tall meadow grass and wild-flowers, to his office. He would pause in front of the ground floor window, tap on it twice with his forefinger, and tip his hat to his daily luncheon companion inside, another elderly gentleman (though some twenty years the publisher's junior): the ad salesman who doubled as circulation manager.

After this ritual, the publisher would enter the building and slowly, slowly climb the long, narrow, marble stairs, each of its steps slightly swaybacked with age. On the landing halfway up, he paused and shuffled into the composing room, where young Ernie, as his father had before him, supervised the two big soot-black linotype machines, both suspending at one side their "pigs," the long clubs of lead that would be melted down into type. He exchanged good mornings with Ernie and the two printers, asked after

their families and, sometimes, about the machines. The Ludlow, on which the headlines were set, was more ancient than the publisher himself.

Then, sometimes nodding in satisfaction, the old man would resume his laborious way up the top flight of stairs, to the frosted glass door of the editorial offices.

Dog Barker, the paper's city editor and chief reporter—whose wife was the only person in town who called him Doug—started his work day before the rest of the staff. He made the coffee. Before taking his cup into his private office, the publisher would ask, "And how's your ma?"

When first posed this question, Dog used to redden and scratch the back of his neck because his mother had been dead for years. But, in time, he got used to it. "She was a corker, wasn't she?" he'd reply. He was a large man in his late forties, just beginning to develop a paunch. His desk chair would creak as he chuckled, telling some tale about the day Ma did this or that, trying to choose the incidents his boss had figured in also.

And so the old man gently peeled away from life, becoming a ghost of himself, as it were, in the year before his death, which came on a blus-

tery Thursday in March. The next day the paper came out, as it always did on Friday, but with its front page bordered in black. For six months, the *Gazette* continued to flourish. For six months, word of the town's events flowed unimpeded down the lane to the former mill, and Dog and his staff of three separated the wheat from the chaff and ground out the news. Lynne Marino, the lifestyle editor, and Richie Cook, the sports editor, covered their beats, and Dog handled the town's governmental boards and agencies. Whoever was free covered the courts, the Chamber and service clubs, the fire and police news; whoever had time picked up the births at the hospital. Hazel Fourchette, a former schoolteacher who had moved to Otter Creek on her retirement, was the *Gazette's* proof-reader and wrote the obits. "I never minded taking attendance," she said.

Dog that spring won the state award for best investigative story in a weekly for his series on the effluent entering the creek from Northland Chemicals, and Richie got honorable mention in spot news, sports, and second place for his photo of a trillium, white, pure and yet exotic, rising from a woodland bed of moss and maiden-hair fern.

The two men were good friends, despite having little in common. Dog's forum after work was the Pine Room at the inn. Richie was a fisherman, hiker, and naturalist, whose dark curls could be seen bobbing along the trails on Mount Homer even in winter. He handled his beat adroitly but had chosen sports, he said, mainly because he liked to be outdoors.

One hot afternoon in late summer, Lynne hung up the phone and with both hands lifted her long dark hair off the back of her neck and let it fall again. "I think I'll go cover the lake," she said.

"Yeah, they say it's wetter this August, check it out," Dog muttered without taking his eyes from the story on his desk. With his pencil, he deleted a word.

Lynne groaned. "I have to do Dr. Abrams at three." The town's busiest dentist had won a new Buick in a sweepstakes. "So I'll do the cop shop," she said.

"Dentist pulls it off, there's your head," Dog said. "Maybe he'll give you some free falsies."

"Ask for some laughing gas and get the interview from the chair," Richie suggested, and turned to Dog.

Hazel said, "Lynne needs falsies like I need two holes in the head." They all laughed.

"How's it read?" Richie asked.

Dog said judiciously, "It's down to your usual standard." He looked at Richie over his glasses. "Not bad."

Lynne's phone rang again. A moment later, she shot straight up from her chair, frantically wagging her left hand high as she simultaneously listened to her caller and looked at her colleagues, from one startled face to the next. She covered the mouthpiece and told them, quick as a flash, before resuming the phone conversation: "We've been sold!"

Their new publisher was a Boston man called Peter Trader, who arrived in mid-September. Within a week, the staff had taken his measure. He was rich. Opinionated. Ignorant. "And the last two make a lousy combo," Dog and Richie agreed. Foul-mouthed, for all his silk suits. "Heck, the language doesn't bother me, but have you ever heard Peter Trader tell a joke that was funny?" Hazel demanded. Trader was lascivious.

The rear door of the office the four staff members shared opened into a hallway leading in one direction to the wash-room, in the other, to the publisher's private office. One day, as Lynne was walking toward the bathroom, Trader's chubby frame barred the way. "Toll on this road is one kiss, miss," he

said, eyes twinkling in his florid face.

Lynne thought it was so trite it was almost comical. "More than I can afford," she said firmly, and turned back as if nothing had happened. Another day, he managed to grab her and plant a kiss on the side of her chin before she could push him away. Lynne's senior class had voted her not only "most beautiful" but "most down-to-earth." She told the others afterwards, "Next time I'll kick him in the you-know-where."

According to Hazel—citing Richie's small hands and feet—the sports editor resembled the etched illustrations in a Sir Walter Scott novel. While Lynne spoke, he had been sitting with one leg bent backward from his desk, his hand on his hip, where the sword would have been in another century. Now, with lips compressed into a thin pale line in his dark beard, he strode to the window, turned back, glared at Lynne, and said, "I'll kill 'im." He raised a finger as if he were scolding her. "He tries that one more time, I'll kill 'im."

Lynne's hands flew to the arms of her chair. She sat up very straight, and spoke quietly. "Do you think I can take care of this?"

The sports editor, breathing

hard and meeting her eyes, finally muttered yes.

"Then let me."

Dog cocked an eyebrow at Hazel. Over a beer at the Pine Room after work, he told her, "Maybe you're right, sure sounded like they do see each other out of the office." He grinned.

"Now, Dog, don't you dare, not one word in front of either of them!"

"Me?" Dog sipped his beer. "Wonder if her kids take to him."

"Don't see why they shouldn't. He can be a hothead, though."

Dog considered this statement. "He's okay." They agreed it would be a good match, since Lynne's no-good ex had left the state and didn't send a penny in support of her two children.

As it happened, however, Richie had been reacting out of idealism and Lynne, out of pride. At the time, they had never met outside the office. Perhaps, at the time, they were unaware of their mutual attraction, or only dimly conscious of it. They had never even discovered they thought alike on the question of office romances—that they were best avoided.

Hazel and Dog were wrong about something else that night, too. "That guy? He's no match for Lynne. She'll be okay," Dog said, and Hazel concurred.

"We'll train 'im," she said. "He'll settle down."

At thirty-seven, Trader had never married. "Waiting for the right woman?" someone had asked him at a Kiwanis lunch.

"No, for the right——," he replied, using a vulgarity. He ducked his pear-shaped face over his food and grinned slyly sideways at his questioner. "As far as I'm concerned, they could all be the same above the waist." The other man choked momentarily, then responded with a booming laugh.

Trader donated twenty thousand dollars to the Kiwanis drive to build a new hospital, and delivered an erudite and charming speech on "The Fourth Estate" at the meeting celebrating the achievement of the fund-raising goal. The Kiwanians were rather in awe of him.

The *Gazette's* new publisher had inherited his wealth. He had previously bought a yacht, a motorcycle, and a savings and loan association, and had sold them all. The paper was his latest toy. He got rid of the hot-lead machines in the composing room and installed an electronic system. The lead pig from the Ludlow came to rest on a bookshelf in his private office as a conversation piece, near the new leather couch. He

bought a magnificent antique walnut desk and placed it at the front of the editorial office. At his direction, Dog and Richie rearranged the staff's desks into two rows, two desks deep, in the manner of a miniature schoolroom. Trader had gone out of town for a week, providing the staff no explanation for his absence, and had returned with two easygoing men who supervised the installation of the main computer in a walled-off section of the composing room and a video display terminal, a VDT as they called it, on every desk, including the one in Trader's office. The publisher airily dismissed their offer to train the staff, saying, "I'll teach them myself."

His method was to issue complicated commands and merely repeat the same words in a louder voice if someone muttered, "I don't get it."

Hazel became increasingly flustered and vexed, "Well, why don't you *explain* that step instead of just repeating it? We're not hard of hearing!"

Trader, who had been marching from desk to desk, wheeled on his heel. "Miss Fourchette, you may go to the cloakroom!" Despite themselves, the others laughed—to their regret, when they caught sight of Hazel's face. Although the publisher sometimes lost his temper and

kicked over a wastebasket, more often a genial smile played on his lips during these lessons, as if to indicate his employees shouldn't take his insults seriously; after all, he was just saying the same sort of thing they said to each other in fun.

To Dog: "Look, it's very simple, even *you* should be able to understand this. There's an In File, an Out File, a Futures File, and a Kill File."

To Richie: "Now, Junior, stop being a poet for a minute. If you want a story, you have to put in its exact slug. The slug is 'award,' singular, not 'awards,' plural. If you master this, you may someday learn the difference between one home run and two."

But Lynne got the worst of it, although his tone was softer. "All right, why are you getting 'Invalid Command'? What is the machine trying to tell you? Take your mind off your new sweater and pay attention." When she bridled, he sneered—or was he kidding? "Feature writers are a dime a dozen, baby. Or should I say, 'Mizz Baby'?" He surveyed her mildly, almost puckishly.

The first Friday in December, for the first time in history, the Otter Creek Gazette missed its deadline, and in fact, did not hit the street until Monday morning, causing considerable

loss in ad revenue.

The publisher stayed in his private office Tuesday morning instead of assuming his post at his "teacher's desk." Richie called the manufacturer of the VDT system, breaking Trader's new rule banning out-of-state calls, and was told Mr. Trader had been supplied with a full set of instruction manuals. "He must have mislaid them," Richie said, rolling his eyes in wrath, and was promised a new set.

On his way out to lunch, Trader placed a set of manuals on his desk and proceeded without a word. Had he listened in on his extension, or eavesdropped in the hall? When he returned, he made no mention of the open manuals next to the VDT's on each desk. Nor did any staff member mention them, or comment on the box that arrived in the mail shortly thereafter.

They mastered the VDT's. Hazel became so proficient in tapping the system's more sophisticated capabilities that Dog told her she must be spending her days off hustling the kids in the video arcades. For a while, Trader's behavior was unremarkable, and among themselves, the staff members broached the possibility that they had been wrong about him, had mistaken his boorish-

ness for something more malevolent, antagonized him unconsciously, perhaps—they had had things their own way for such a long time. During the caroling at the Christmas party, Trader's face beamed angelically, and watching him, Dog wondered if their Scrooge had reformed.

The new year raged in with a series of blizzards. The wind tore at the creaking trees and swaying power lines, hurled great gusts of snow at pedestrians on Main Street, stinging their eyes and forcing them to bow their heads as they struggled past half-buried cars. The lane to the newspaper office was plowed and was deep in snow two hours later. If another howling wind brought no new snow, it redistributed its former wealth: the drifts over the bottom half of the lane were as high as the snowbanks bordering its entry off Main Street.

And Trader, not to be outdone, reverted to his old ways, heaping upon his staff humiliation after humiliation, and inventing ingenious new torments. Aha—the financial area! Had he overlooked it before? Raises were dangled and snatched away. When days off were granted to compensate for night work, the editors found a

day's pay docked in their checks. Although he made no overt move in Lynne's direction for long periods again, he sat at his teacher's desk not even pretending to work but with his eyes fixed on her. Or were they? Sometimes she would feel them searing the top of her head, and her upward glance would find him looking vacantly out the window. But more often, their eyes would meet for a second. "Yes?" he would murmur, "did you want something, Lynne?" By this time, her head would be bowed again; she would frown at the small green letters forming on the dark screen as she typed, as if concentrating on an especially difficult passage.

The staff devised a system to communicate on the VDT's and used it even when Trader was purportedly in his own office, since they had reason to believe he often eavesdropped in the hall. In addition to finding a story by requesting its file, one could simply ask for it by its slug, the short word used to identify it. To prevent Trader, at either of his terminals, from stumbling on one of their messages, they used letters instead of real words as slugs. A message intended for one person was slugged with an initial followed by the next two letters of the alphabet: LMN for Lynne, DEF for Dog, and so forth. Notes

intended for all were slugged OLL. At the end of each day, they always killed all their messages twice, and Dog killed the ones slugged OLL. Hazel had discovered a feature of the system that guarded against inadvertent deletions of stories and allowed editors to change their minds. The first kill wasn't enough to erase the story; to remove it from the system's memory, one had to repeat the procedure.

One day, Trader handed Lynne a folded release with a note, also folded, on top of it. When she read the note, she turned scarlet and dropped it on her desk. She felt his eyes on her; she tried to keep her hand steady while she used the release to brush the note into the wastebasket, as she would a dead insect.

She couldn't bring herself to tell the others. The words on the note were so horrible—so incredible! In a way, she felt obscurely ashamed for Trader himself, that a man in his position could do something like that! Again and again, she thought of her former boss, the elderly gentleman's kindness—even in his confusion—and experienced a depth of mourning for him that in fact she had not felt when he died.

For the first time, she was afraid, even in her own kitchen

that night, cooking dinner for the kids. After she put them to bed, she paced the living room floor, stepping unnaturally quietly as if afraid of being heard, and wondered at her own behavior, and turned on the TV and stood next to the front window for a long time. For a change, the night was clear, but bitter cold. Then she told herself she was being silly; he wouldn't watch the house—in this weather? She sat down again and tried to pay attention to the TV show, but went back to the window time and time again to draw the drapes slightly and peek outside. The last time she did this, just before bed, her heart leaped at the sight of the man across the street, motionless at the edge of the circle of light from the streetlamp, until he moved and she recognized her neighbor and saw his dog.

It was in this frame of mind that she took the kids up to Mount Homer Saturday, where the town sponsored free ski lessons. It was a dazzling day, and warmer, but for a while, Lynne sat in the lodge with some friends, feeling withdrawn and miserable, until she told them she guessed she'd go watch the kids.

Instead, she turned into the woods of fragrant pine and fir trees next to the ski area. The snow cover was relatively light,

since the trees grew so close together that their boughs had shielded the ground from the snow, just as now they were filtering the sunlight. Aimlessly, she followed the tracks of some small creature as her options tumbled through her mind: moving from Otter Creek; staying in town and working for Northland or somebody; going to Vince, the police chief; bringing a sexual harassment suit, as the guys at the office kept telling her to . . . and on and on. The trail turned a corner; she turned with it, and came upon Richie, sitting on his heels next to the tracks, his bearded face raised in her direction.

"Lynne!" He had heard someone coming but was startled simply because he had been thinking about her at the moment she appeared, contemplating—as he had a hundred times—whether or not he should ask her out some evening. There was an embarrassed moment. They had never been alone together.

"I thought they were rabbit tracks," she said. "They're Richie tracks."

"Fox. Old ones." They squatted on either side of the pattern of little dimples in the snow, and he poked the snow, showing how rabbit tracks would have differed. She had been as pale as the ground when she

had first appeared. Now, in fascination, he watched the color steal back into her cheeks. "I just passed some rabbit ones. Want to see 'em?"

She nodded, and Richie gave her a dazed, brilliant smile. He took her mittened hand and led her a short distance. "See, those are rabbit."

"Mm-hmm." Lynne found her legs trembling slightly. She took her hand from his and leaned against a tree, fingering the needles of a young fir next to her.

Richie started talking about one time in the woods, when he was a kid, which reminded her of a time when she was in the fifth grade . . . Trader's name never came up. Richie said, "There was a beaver pond where we lived—" and stopped. He gave a deep sigh. For some time, his eyes had not left her face. Now he drew his head back slightly, pulling in his chin. "I want to kiss you so much," he said.

Lynne gave an almost imperceptible nod. "Me too."

He took her in his arms, and they kissed, and suddenly Lynne was racked with sobs. She fought for breath, apologized brokenly, arched back from him and pulled away from his arms, now holding both hands against her chest and then over her face as her head lifted and bent, lifted and

bent. When Richie tried to embrace her again, she gasped another apology and almost staggered in the snow as she turned away from him, but immediately turned back again and he held her as she cried, and occasionally tried to laugh until another gust of grief took over. "I know, I know," he said, over and over, and each time he said it, more tears came, until at last, she was hiccupping like a child. And still he held her close; the two bodies rocked slightly to and fro.

And then they talked some more, and kissed, and talked, and made each other laugh. Richie's small feet had often been the butt of office jokes; she told him with mock gravity that she had never kissed anyone before with feet smaller than hers, and with equal solemnity, he agreed, "That's enough to upset anyone."

At last she told him about the note, and he hit a pine tree with such force they were both showered in snow from its branches. "We're gonna sue, that's all," he said after he had calmed down. At these words, she covered her mouth, realizing she should have saved the note. But she didn't berate herself too much over it because—as she told him some weeks later—"That's when I fell in love with you, when you said 'we.'"

The ice remained on Otter Creek past the sightings of the first crocuses, until one night it broke with a mammoth, thrilling series of cracks and roars. The water started flowing freely again, and at intervals, so did the effluent from Northland Chemicals.

The previous year, Dog's prize-winning stories had prodded the state agency into issuing a citation against the firm, with a timetable of compliance. Now the district director for the state told Dog: "To our knowledge, Northland has abided by the terms of its previous citation." Just to make sure, Dog collected samples of the creek water and had them analyzed; astonishingly, Trader okayed the chemist's fees. The carcinogens in Northland's effluent proved to be almost double the previous year's level. These findings catapulted Dog into the strange blend of alarm and satisfaction familiar to the investigative reporter: the effluent posed a grave health threat, or would, in time—and he had a blockbuster story!

He pinned down the loose ends with further calls; filled all the holes with solid quotes, and the story was scheduled to appear Friday on page one.

On Wednesday of the same week, Trader read the final ver-

sion on the VDT at his teacher's desk. He looked up and pursed his lips. "I think I've changed my mind about this pollution story, Dog," he said. "It's . . . well, frankly, it's boring." He nodded judiciously. "Find something else for page one."

Dog was stunned. "We're not gonna run it?"

"No, let's kill it for now." Trader's eyes wandered around the room before they met Dog's again. "It's essentially boring," he repeated in a tone intended to show just how bored he himself was at the moment.

Dog grimly pushed back his chair and stood up. The publisher rose also and left the room. The sound of his footsteps retreated; his office door could be heard opening and closing.

The others had never seen Dog lose his temper. Although he remained standing, almost motionless, at his desk, it was somehow like watching a huge wave build and build until it could rise no more—but still it climbed, impossibly high—before it thundered over. Dog stormed to the front of the room, through the door, and down the hall, slammed Trader's door and shouted: "Are—you—out—of—your MIND?"

They could not make out Trader's quiet answer. Dog shouted some more—about Trader's poisoning the office,

was he after the town now?—about Trader's lack of know-how, lack of social responsibility. . . . Finally, the publisher raised his voice, also, and they heard the words above Dog's; they probably heard them before Dog did: "You're fired! Do you hear me? Get out of here! You're through, you're fired!"

The next morning, Dog was at his desk again, while Trader sat at the front of the room. The messages flew under the secret slugs.

To OLL: He called me at home and we both apologized, blah blah, says he'll run the story. We struck a bargain. Has he talked to you, Lynne? We're to exchange beats for two weeks. His idea of punishment or something for things I said. Ha ha. Watch out, Garden Club.

To DEF: Welcome back to the looney bin. But how do you know he'll keep his word?

To LMN: Don't say anything to Dog yet, but I'm wondering if Trader has outmaneuvered him. If you cover those night meetings, you have to write stories in office afterwards. I'll be here after night games, but I only have one next week. Heck, I'll come other nights, too, just in case. Don't worry.

To DEF: Dear Dog, good for you! We all discussed us all walking out yesterday, you

probably heard.

To RST: I'm not worried. Love to see you at office, but no need. I'm dying to do some hard news again. I'm more worried about babysitting, though, than Trader at this point.

To LMN: Board of Selectmen meet tonight, as I'm sure Tradykens will inform you. Need any briefing? Should be a nothing meeting, but you never know.

To DEF: Repeat, how do you know he'll keep his word? Don't wish to discourage you, but let's plan concerted strategy in case.

To HJ: Sorry, Hazel, didn't answer because I was thinking. Dunno. It's possible. I'll think it through.

To RST: Do you have a game tonight? Dog says Board of Selectmen meet tonight.

To LMN: I'll be here, too. I promise I won't distract you. Other than just one lengthy foot massage.

To RST: You're asking for it, fella. Lay off the length of my feet or I'll charge discrimination. No, reason I asked was in case babysitter can't, could you, please, please? If I let you raid refrig? (Signed) Spokesperson, Sufferers of Ski-Feet.

Richie ended up babysitting at Lynne's house, and Lynne's meeting turned out to include some important issues, and broke up late. At two A.M., she

was still writing her story, wanting to do it justice and prove her ability on the unfamiliar beat. After Richie had called for the seventh time, she told him to quit interrupting her concentration.

That same night, Trader had a hideous dream. Someone was in his office, shouting at him. The lead pig from the Ludlow, the long club resting on the bookcase, which ordinarily had no sheen, was sparkling like new snow under a bright moon. But as he reached for it, he saw the other hand—whose was that gloved hand?—grasping it, raising it. . . . The pain was not black but red-hot, unendurable. Again the club was lifted above his head. Although he felt in the dream that his shouts died in his throat, they in fact woke him up, and he found he was flailing and yelling, and had knocked over the lamp by his bed.

He went downstairs and poured himself a drink. Morosely, he gulped his scotch in the den. Then he went back to bed but couldn't sleep. He tried to cheer himself up by picturing that Northland wimp Reilly's face, when Dog's story ran tomorrow. Ten thousand. Huh, big deal. He visualized himself in the Northland vice president's office. "I'll tear up the check, right in front of his eyes,"

he thought. "I'll say it was a matter of social responsibility." He sighed. Nothing was any fun any more. He tried to sleep. That damn Dog, giving him nightmares. He should have followed his instincts and killed the story. Still could, for that matter. Huh! Why not? He began to feel better.

Trader was puzzled at the light's being on in the office and, when he turned down the lane, was genuinely surprised to see Lynne's car. He grinned as he pulled in next to it. Climbing the stairs, he wondered why she didn't have a boyfriend. Probably because they knew better; she'd turned out to be just as bitchy as all the rest.

"Oh, sorry to scare you," he said pleasantly. "How's it coming?" He went to his teacher's desk.

Lynne regained her composure. "I wasn't scared, Mr. Trader, just startled. I'm almost finished."

"Does it always take you this long?"

"No, it's a new beat. I'm pretty—"

"I wasn't referring to the story."

There was a long pause. Lynne knew by his face that he was making a sexual reference. She didn't get it—but this was no time to figure it out. She was suddenly uneasy. Maybe Richie

was right. Maybe she could finish the story in the morning. "There, that'll do," she said, her tone cheerful and confident. She picked up the phone. "I'll just call my babysitter . . ."

It rang once before Trader was at her side; he grabbed the phone and hung it up.

Lynne sprang to her feet. "What are you—" Then, deliberately, she turned her back on him and walked quickly to the door, and was out the door when Trader pinned her arms from behind and pulled her, struggling and screaming, back inside, and pushed her against the wall by the side of the door. She whipped around to face him as he took a backward step and pulled the door shut.

She scanned the distance to a chair, a weapon. "That call was to Vince at the police station. I arranged with him beforehand!"

He smirked. "You've been seeing too many movies."

Was she babbling? She couldn't tell. She took a deep breath. "I arranged with him beforehand," she repeated. "You don't believe me?" He took a step toward her. "Trader, if you touch me, you're through in this town!"

"Am I touching you?" His eyes on her face, he spread his arms wide and dropped them again. He moved a few steps

back; when she started for the door, he blocked her way.

She tried reasoning with him, asking if he really wanted to throw away everything he had built for himself in this town; he seemed almost convinced—and then, in a low, boastful voice, recited instance after instance of what he took to be proof of Lynne's attraction to him. Occasionally, he responded to whatever she said like an obscene caller, while she listened with arms folded, trying to appear impassive.

At times, she felt more powerful than she ever had in her life.

"That phone didn't ring," he muttered at one point.

"It did!" And the truth of this statement reverberated exultantly in her mind, and she heard herself snarling, sneering, as she related what she would tell Vince, how she would testify in court against the publisher.

At other times, she could barely restrain herself from stamping her foot like a thwarted child and wailing helplessly. Then, she would cling to logic as the only rock available in an undertow of panic. "Okay, Trader, I'll make a deal with you. Maybe I won't bring charges if—right now—you go and sit at your desk." Firmly, eyes on his face, she pointed to

the front of the room.

At last! These words produced the desired effect. He took a few steps toward his desk; she ran for the door; he beat her to it and blocked her way; and sobbing and yelling, she hammered him with her fists, and Richie's shouts on the stairs came closer and closer—"Trader! Trader!" with the rising inflection of a warning—and Lynne drew back from Trader, doubling over in exhaustion, her mouth limp, and Trader, at the sound of the voice and the footsteps pounding up the stairs, ran past her like a frightened rabbit to his office.

"You okay?" She nodded. "Where is he?" Richie didn't wait for her answer but charged past the teacher's desk and through the door beyond it.

Trader stood next to his office door with the lead club raised. Richie swerved; the blow grazed his shoulder. Again Trader lifted his weapon and the two men struggled for its possession; it moved above them like a giant metronome in slow motion until Richie wrested it away and brought it down on Trader's head.

Dog groaned and answered the phone. "What? Wait a minute." He turned on the light and put the phone on the

bedside table, murmuring, "Sorry, hon." Then he rubbed his eyes and reached for his glasses.

His wife gave a sleepy giggle. "What're you putting on your glasses for?"

"I dunno." He picked up the phone again.

"Goddammit—"

"Richie! Where the hell are you? What's up?"

"I'm in the cop shop. Listen, I hit Trader. He hit me first, but . . . You know the pig off the Ludlow?"

Dog threw back his head and gave a whooping laugh. "Did ya kill him? Damn it, I bet you only hit him once, you gotta kill 'im twice, I keep telling you!"

But then he sobered at the wretched tone of Richie's voice: "Boy, Dog, I'm just . . . I didn't have to go in there. God, why did I go in there?"

"Is he dead?"

"I hope not. I hope not." He paused. "I never thought I'd be saying that." Dog grunted in agreement. "He's in the hospital."

"I'll be right down. You got the lawyer? I'll get the lawyer from here and call the bail bondsman. Listen, Rich— never mind, I'll be there in a minute. With a Nobel prize nomination for public service. Don't admit anything. Tell Vince to give you a medal."

It was six A.M. before Dog got back to bed. Alone—his wife was minding Lynne's kids. Richie was home, out on bail, and Lynne was with him. All bodies accounted for. Except one. He called the hospital again. Finally, a diagnosis! "Mild concussion," the nurse said, "he'll be good as new in a few days."

After hanging up, Dog swung his legs onto the floor. "Thank God." Then he groaned. "Oh, Lord." He contemplated the patterned rug. Richie would be fired, of course, or quit; same with Lynne. And Hazel, probably. So. Looked like it was time to leave Otter Creek. Concord, maybe. Even Boston.

—And the town would have no paper, in effect. Trader would hire a new crew, and if he was smart, a compliant one. Nobody good would stay. He stretched out again, gloomily envisioning the creek, with its willows hanging down in summer, and the dark water with its hidden poison, until he was overtaken by sleep.

“Quite a paper today,” said Frank Hagopian. “Thanks, counselor,” Dog said. It was three thirty that afternoon. Dog’s story, under a banner

headline, was on the front page above Lynne’s, which she had finished after she’d put her kids on the school bus. Dog had written a three-paragraph story on “an altercation at the Otter Creek *Gazette*” and subbed it for a filler on page eight. Now, in the lawyer’s office, he grumbled. “But I wish everybody would pay as much attention to page one as page eight.” His eyes flicked to the window. “Starting to rain,” he muttered. He folded his arms and leaned back in his chair. “So whaddya think?” Dog had always covered Hagopian’s cases fairly; he knew the lawyer would return the favor.

“We’ll win,” Hagopian said, adding that he had told both Richie and Lynn to simply tell the truth in court: “Truth is very persuasive in the witness chair.” But after that, playing devil’s advocate, he speculated on the prosecution, conducted by what would undoubtedly be a superb team of high-priced Boston lawyers. “In their shoes, I wouldn’t put my client on the stand,” he said. “And if he testifies, we can expect him to lie—convincingly?”

Dog paused. “Yes.”

Yes, he thought, an hour later, as he drove home to catch a nap; he had been up since nine. Yes, Trader would also plead self-defense. No houses within ear-

shot of the paper, only office buildings—nobody heard Lynne's screams. She had emerged from the encounter without a scratch, not even the slightest rip in her clothes. And previously? Trader stole a kiss once. He looked at her. "You hadda be there," Dog mumbled to an imaginary jury. Dog had seen justice done and justice subverted. He could almost hear the sarcastic oratory in the prosecution's summation. "He gave her a note, ladies and gentlemen, which she cannot produce. The defendant's colleagues naturally support his version of his so-called provocation. They profess that working conditions were unbearable under Mr. Trader. Yet they did not quit. They say their morale suffered, yet the paper's quality remained high. As for the defendant, he clearly saw that his sweetheart was unharmed, yet he ran into Mr. Trader's private office and, he says, was met by his publisher holding an upraised club. Is that likely? Is it not more likely that the two men had an argument, that the younger one seized the club, and that Mr. Trader managed to land a blow which hardly deterred a young and vigorous outdoorsman, who in the heat of the moment felled Mr. Trader in a manner that could easily have been lethal?"

Thinking of his jubilation when Richie had called from the police station, Dog felt wistful.

Hazel, meanwhile, was gazing over her VDT at Trader's desk, her chin in both hands. It was like that news story about the war games, she reflected. Some Washington outfit had pitted a "sane" computer against a "mad" one. The sane one lost, unable to counter the other's illogical responses. At last she returned to her work: proofreading the stories in the Futures File, and making printouts of each. The machine that performed this function chattered out the material at the side of the room, and Hazel walked over to wait for a long story to be copied. Then she had a stroke of blind luck—or that's how she thought of it later. Next to the printout machine stood another device that periodically indicated how much of the system's memory was occupied. As she stood there, this monitor gave one of its little spurts of information and fell still again. She stared at the figure, trying to remember when they'd checked it last. Seventy-three point three percent? Odd.

At her terminal, she asked for the total number of inches in all the files. She calculated

rapidly. Oh, what a terrible thought! Had he read their secret messages? Hadn't they killed them properly? Was that what had inflamed Trader enough to stand there with his club when he heard Richie? Quickly, she entered each of their slugs, RST and the rest, and in each case, the words INVALID SLUG appeared, indicating that no entry under these slugs existed in the system.

Giving a little yelp, she hit the flat of both hands on the arms of her chair. Could it be that Trader had forgotten, or didn't know, that you had to kill everything twice? Did he have his own secret slug? A journal, perhaps, revealing all his sadistic thoughts and plans, that he thought he'd killed because he'd only done it once? She clasped her hands as fervently as a seven-year-old pleading to go to the fair.

Well, too much to ask for, maybe.

But worth a try!

How could she ever find it, though? What slug would he choose?

The first thing she thought of was HATE. The terminal responded with INVALID SLUG. JOURNAL. Nothing. DIARY. No good. She tried SEX, WANT, DESIRE, all the dirty words she could think of, and dozens of other slugs, which all proved

fruitless. She listened to the rain on the window a moment, then went and sat at Trader's desk. If only she could figure out what went on in his head. "They don't like me," she thought. "They're all working, and I feel, I feel . . ." LONELY. LONESOME. Two invalid slugs.

At last, after pacing around the room, she walked into Trader's office and lay down on his leather sofa. "I'm rich. I'll show them who's boss." She studied her legs in their beige hose. Thin as slats. No fun being old. But then she pulled her mind back to the task at hand. "I'm rich, but I'm bored. Maybe I should start a little trouble. Put some spark in the day." Why, how strange—she almost felt sorry for the man!

When she resumed her seat at Trader's desk, she stared into the distance for a while. Heavens, was she ever that mean? Power corrupts . . . Well, she hadn't been, that's all, get to work. All right. "I'm sitting here, and they never do things my way. I'll show them who's boss." She tried BOSS and a story flashed onto the screen! Wanting to show his puppy who was boss, Bill Duprez of Waybridge Lane . . . She clicked her tongue in disappointment.

Of course. He wouldn't use a real word, for the same reason they hadn't. Well, as Dog said,

never overlook the obvious. She tried his name in their own code, and then, variations of his first and last name. PTR. TRDR. Then she went back over all the slugs she had tried already, leaving out the vowels. On the other hand, she mused, it would be like Trader to use a real word, hoping in a way they would read the stuff. His idea of FUN. No good. FN, just in case. GAME. A story of Richie's. He'd put two m's in accumulate, right in the lead, too, and she hadn't caught it. GAMES. Nothing. GMS—and the screen filled with the green letters and words, like some dazzling scroll of all wisdom and knowledge, unfolding paragraph after paragraph! She read:

"9/19. I don't like them already, except for the girl. She's the type you want to . . ." Vile images and expressions occupied the next four paragraphs.

Hazel sat back, triumphant and a little shaken. Then she said, very loudly, "Well, is that so, Mr. Trader!" The rest of the entry concerned the "solidarity" of the staff, mentioned often and disparagingly, and his own power. He ended with: "Weird that Dog has lived in this punk town all his life and I understand the people better than he does."

Hazel requested a printout. The slug for his next entry

proved comparatively easy. Yes, GMS 9/20—even if it yielded only two words: Shoes. Booze. Nothing under GMS 9/21, and screenload after screenload on the 22nd. Before reading it, she called Dog to tell him the marvelous news and enlist his help in recording what she was sure would be months and months of entries.

The Northland deal was first mentioned in January, and Dog yelled it out to Hazel, jumped up and waltzed her round the room before settling down at his terminal to issue joyful bulletins.

They worked on. They sent out for sandwiches and beer, and kept on working. They called Lynne's house and the babysitter answered; they called Richie's and nobody answered; probably the phone was off the hook. They called Hagopian, who shared their enthusiasm, and kept on working, in glee, in horror, in disgust, in wonder. "He says it might be fun to tell Dog I'm promoting him to managing editor and tell Richie the same thing." Dog frowned in puzzlement at Hazel. "He never did *that*."

Hazel shrugged, reading another passage about poor Lynne.

And finally, they came to the end, dated a few days previously, and talked about making another copy of all of it, and

decided they were too tired and could do it in the morning. Bringing out her capacious handbag, Hazel said, "I'll put the whole rat's nest in here, just in case." She rubbed the back of her neck. "Well, I guess we know how the trial will come out now."

Dog said, "Why have a trial?"

He didn't wait for Trader to leave the hospital but visited him with a large and very fat envelope, saying his next stop would be the Kiwanis, then the Rotary, Chamber, Garden Club, Board of Selectmen, Pine Room, and finally the D.A., to inform him of the Northland deal—unless Trader dropped charges against Richie and checked out of town when he checked out of the hospital.

Trader was as white as the extensive bandage on his head. He read the first entry, biting a finger all the while, and petulantly tossed the printout for-

ward on his bed. "I'll have you arrested for blackmail."

"Yeah?"

Trader, his mouth working, looked at the envelope in Dog's hand.

"Oh, I'll go," he said finally, in the voice of a teenager to a nagging parent.

"One more thing. Now that you've tipped me off, I can nail Reilly on my own. And I will."

"Who? Oh, the Northland wimp." Unexpectedly, Trader gave Dog a charming smile. "Good." Then he said, almost fondly, "Oh, Dog, Dog, Dog . . ." And his voice trailed off as he stared at the printout on his blanket. From beneath the covers, he gave it a little kick, muttering an obscenity. "I killed that stuff."

Dog thought it unnecessary to explain that you had to kill everything twice. Enough that, in a sense, they'd done it to Trader himself. "Just get out, Trader," he said. "You're dead in this town."

MURDER BY DIRECTION

by Peter Shaw



Beyond the Limit brings *The Honorary Consul*, Graham Greene's atmospheric novel of a South American political kidnapping, faithfully and effectively to the screen. On the surface the plot appears to represent a pure case of detection for the police. A handful of political revolutionaries cross the river from Peru into northern Argentina. They plan to kidnap the American ambassador when he arrives to tour some local ruins. They will demand the release from prison in Peru of twenty comrades who are suffering under the brutal hand of the dictator, Stroessner (who goes unnamed in the movie).

Sixtyish, drunken Charlie Fortnum is the local English "honorary consul"—really no more than a glorified part-time

clerk and semi-official host for occasional visiting dignitaries like the American ambassador. When the political desperadoes mistakenly abduct Fortnum instead of the ambassador, they immediately reduce their demand for the release of prisoners by half. But like everyone else, they know that Charlie is probably too unimportant to be worth anything at all.

Dr. Plarr—thirtyish, single, unpolitical—is half English and half Paraguayan. He knows the kidnappers, and it is he who supplies them with the ambassador's itinerary. Plarr mistakenly believes that his father is still alive in a Peruvian jail, and the kidnappers keep his hope alive by including the father's name among those whose release they demand.

Plarr tries to be standoffish



Michael Caine stars as the alcoholic local British consul of a South American province in *Beyond the Limit*.

Copyright © MCMLXXXIII by Parsons & Whittemore Lyddon Limited.

except for giving the initial information, but he becomes more and more involved. As he is inexorably drawn into the affair, the police chief, a casual acquaintance, follows along in his wake. At first Plarr draws suspicion to himself because he has been having an affair with Charlie Fortnum's nineteen-year-old wife, but then his genuinely concerned efforts to save Charlie by stirring up indifferent public officials temporarily throw the police chief off the track.

In the end, as the police are closing in on the kidnappers and their hostage, Plarr finds himself trapped among them. Together they all wait in a sweltering mud hut somewhere in an unnamed Argentine barrio, or slum, an ideal Graham Greene setting for the individual crises of faith that then take place. Charlie Fortnum, who is to be shot by his kidnappers when the police attack, was born a Catholic but faces his impending death strictly as an atheist. Dr. Plarr is one of Greene's spiritually dead men. Nevertheless, he finally experiences contrition over having made Charlie's wife pregnant. Finally, the leader of the revolutionaries is an atheistic former priest whose common-law wife persuades him to conduct a mass for the group.

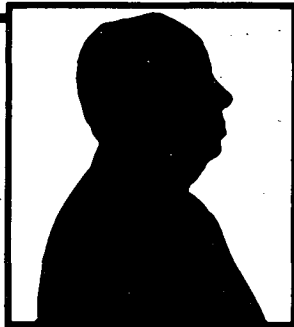
Beyond the Limit very efficiently leaves out most of the metaphysical speculation accompanying these developments and manages to give the impression of thoughtfulness without slowing down the action. As Charlie Fortnum, Michael Caine captures the novel's boozy, lazy, gullible yet somehow dignified honorary consul. Richard Gere's American good looks and his air of integrity hardly represent the spiritual deadness of Dr. Plarr, but Gere does a nice job of underplaying and almost turns the trick.

The movie departs from the book when it makes the police worse and the revolutionaries better than they appear on paper. Thus their leader's common-law wife is transformed from a simpleminded peasant into a tough, modern woman of whom feminists would approve. The rest of the gang, like her, tend toward the noble and heroic. These particular qualities are of course pointedly absent from any Graham Greene novel.

On balance, *Beyond the Limit* comes off as an intelligent, satisfying political thriller. It is sure to lead many viewers to pick up the paperback of *The Honorary Consul*. There they will find both more reflection and more police work. They will also see that the movie stands up very nicely on its own.

FRAMES OF REFERENCE

by Peter Christian



In the recent thriller called *Star Chamber* (reviewed in *Murder by Direction*, AHMM, November, 1983), Michael Douglas plays an earnest young judge who realizes that a secret society of jurists made up of the most responsible citizens in his community is meting out death sentences to criminals who have escaped the arms of justice. Because he himself has seen the most heinous felons walk out of court free men, thanks to legal loopholes, Douglas reluctantly joins this band of elite **vigilantes**. His moral dilemma makes for a thoughtful—if ultimately irritating—film, but it is not the first time the movies have assessed community groups who have decided to administer private justice.

Indeed, in the troubled 1930's, when the very social order itself seemed floundering, this theme was explored more than once. The best film of the lot was *Beast of the City* (1932), based on a story by W. R. Burnett, in which chief of police Walter Huston—aware, to his disgust, that his city is overrun with racketeers—organizes an elite team of crack police officers to go outside the law in combat with crime boss Jean Hersholt. At the climax both the secret police squad and the gangsters lie dead, having eliminated each other in a blazing gun battle. Somewhat bizarrely, the film opens with a message from President Hoover: "Instead of glorification of gangsters, we need glorification of policemen."

A film the year before, *The Secret Six*, had a similar vigilante ardor, but without fatal consequences to the organization of business leaders who—disturbed that the law seems powerless to stop

a band of bootleggers from taking over the city—enlist private force to wipe out the criminal element (headed by Wallace Beery).

Some secret groups were more flamboyant. Edgar Wallace's *The Four Just Men* (1939) brought together a quartet of citizens ranging from millionaire to actor who felt justice was theirs to dispense: one of the targets for extinction is a nasty member of Parliament. *The Secret Seven* (1940) were an unorthodox group of behavioral scientists who bypass the police in nailing murderers. In the *Masked Marvel* serial (1943), one of a group of four crimefighters going after Japanese spies infiltrating this country dons the mask and uniform of a costumed avenger, anonymously and without qualms killing the enemy right and left. Not even the audience knows which one of the four the Masked Marvel actually is—but since, in succeeding chapters of havoc, the crimefighters one by one lose their lives, it ultimately becomes a process of elimination.

Films about Klan groups are a different theme, of course, because while their membership is secret their existence is public. In more recent decades the secret society has made use of academic fraternities. Glenn Ford made his television acting debut in *The Brotherhood of the Bell* (1970), playing a college professor who is asked by a secret fraternal group he had joined years before—a club that promised its members monetary gain and professional power—to do something quite illegal, for the “common good.” Defiance of this order could be fatal. And in *Lords of Discipline* (1982), a proud Southern military school festers a secret ten-member fraternity that drives out unacceptable students.

Interestingly, the inner-police idea of *Beast of the City* seems to have come full circle in *Magnum Force* (1973), the second “Dirty Harry” film, in which maverick San Francisco cop Harry Callahan unearths a group of elite policemen who have become private executioners. Today, a time seemingly of eroding values and shaky justice, the vigilante police and masked judges of films like *Magnum Force* and *Star Chamber* seem increasingly the stuff of movie melodrama.

UNSOLVED

by
George J. Summers

Unsolved at present, that is, but can you work it out?

The answer will appear in the February issue.

Part I

Alden, Brent, Clark, and Doyle were seated around a square table in a restaurant when Doyle fell dead from poison. When questioned by a detective each man made two statements as follows:

- ALDEN: 1. I sat next to Brent.
2. Brent or Clark sat on my right and that person could not have poisoned Doyle.
- BRENT: 3. I sat next to Clark.
4. Alden or Clark sat on Doyle's right and that person could not have poisoned Doyle.
- CLARK: 5. I sat across from Doyle.
6. If only one of us is lying that person poisoned Doyle.

After talking to the waiter who had served them, the detective told them, truthfully:

7. Only one of you lied.
8. One of you poisoned Doyle.

Which one of the three men poisoned Doyle?

Part II

The wives of Alden, Brent, and Clark witnessed Doyle's death by poison when the four men were seated around the square table in the restaurant. When questioned by the detective each woman

made two statements, referring to the suspects by their first names, as follows:

- RAY'S WIFE: 1. Ray sat next to Sid.
2. Sid or Ted sat on Ray's right and he could not have poisoned Doyle.
- SID'S WIFE: 3. Sid sat next to Ted.
4. Ray or Ted sat on Doyle's right and he could not have poisoned Doyle.
- TED'S WIFE: 5. Ted sat next to Doyle.
6. If only one of us is lying that person is the murderer's wife.

After talking to the waiter who had served the four men, the detective told the women, truthfully:

7. Only one of you lied.

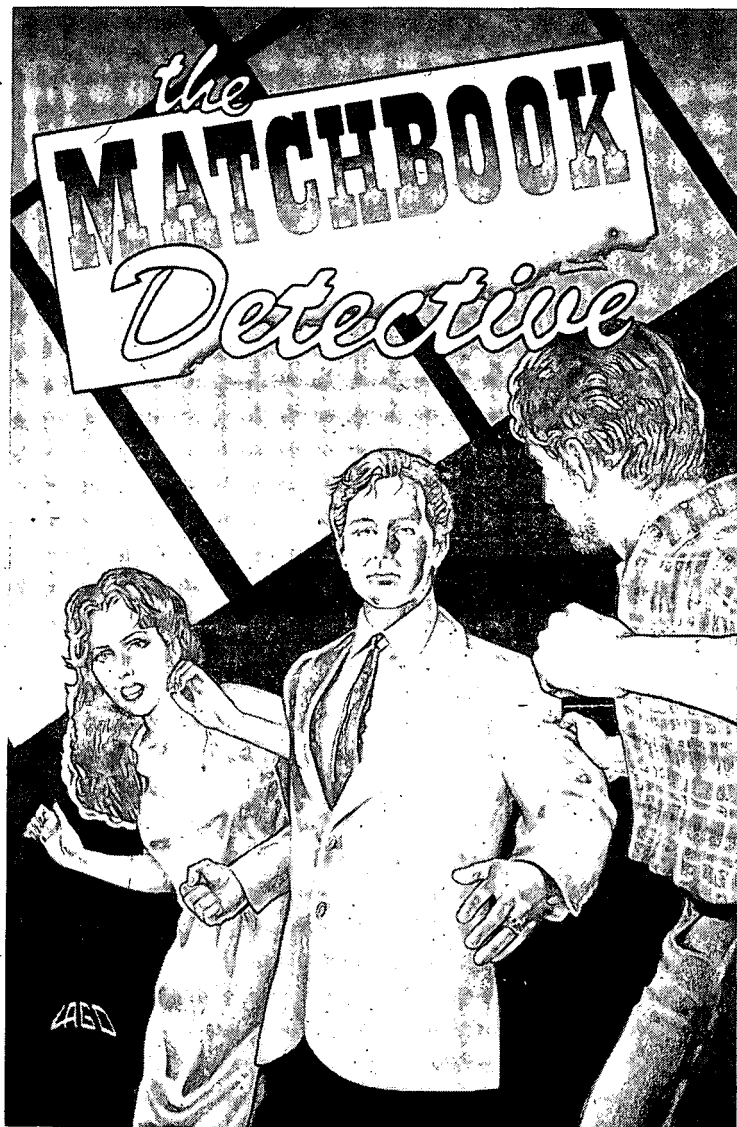
Which one of the three women was the murderer's wife?

NOTE: *The solution to Part II must be consistent with the statements in Part I.*

See page 153 for the solution to the December puzzle.

"The Square Table," taken from New Puzzles in Logical Deduction by George J. Summers. Copyright © 1968 by George J. Summers, Dover Publications, Inc., N.Y., N.Y.

FICTION



by E.E. Aydelotte

Illustration by Ray Lago

98

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

One day I am in a state liquor store buying a pack of cigarettes plus some medicine for my landlady who happens to be the mother of my girlfriend Olive, when I also take some matches from a bowl of the same they have on the counter by the cash register. I do not notice until I get home that inside these matches is a limited offer from the Matchbook Detecting School of Yuma, Arizona, to become a certified correspondence school private detective.

The detecting business (asserts the inside cover of the matchbook) is expanding daily and has an urgent need for new operatives. It is the growth field for the eighties. To verify this startling fact all I need do is read the crime page in my local newspaper, says the matchbook.

I do so and find that the matchbook is correct. Crime is on the rise in the U.S. of A. and there is a shortage of trained detection operatives. This I prove with my own newspaper and so I rush to my savings and loan, withdraw a money order for \$87.95, and I am forthwith enrolled in detecting school.

It is difficult and exacting work, this detecting school correspondence course from Yuma, Arizona. Perhaps you have never had to memorize the four stages of decomposition in a corpse, or the complete text of the Detective's Code of Honor, or what the seven warning signs of adultery are. I have, and I can tell you that it is not a picnic situation.

Resolutely I finish the six weeks of travail and eventually the biggest day of my life occurs although I am at work and miss it as my landlady signs for the package which comes first class mail and contains my inscribed diploma from the Matchbook Detecting School of Yuma, Arizona, along with a genuine copper-plated private detecting badge, and a very generous offer to enroll in the postgraduate course (open to Honor Roll students only, of which I find I am a prominent member) for the special discount tuition of \$318.75 (regularly \$425.00).

Regretfully I forego the postgraduate course as I am now restricted on funds, having decided to leave my old employment as finished goods inspector at Mr. Penney's rubber band factory on the south side. Mr. Penney is somewhat difficult about it, but I stick my resolve in the butter, as they say.

"Warner Digby!" bellows old Mr. Penney, "You've pulled some damn fine boners in your eleven years with me. Yes! I can remember at least a half a dozen triple doozies, like the time you thought you saw—"

"We agreed never to speak of that, Mr. Penney," I interrupt him, "and besides, I paid for the horse out of my own paycheck which you so helpfully deducted in advance of my offer, and I do think your protest in this situation is based on jealousy."

"Jealousy?" he sputters. Mr. Penney is eighty-three and he sputters when he becomes enraged, which is a daily occurrence in the rubber band plant.

"Yes," I admonish him, "jealous of the young women I will be having social intercourse with daily now. You have seen examples of this on television detective shows—which I very well know, having been invited once to the Superbowl at your wide screen although I could not attend because you had me scheduled to work overtime that Sunday."

Mr. Penney sputters and rages as is his custom; but I am firm in my resolve. I am assisted by my mind's eye view of the Matchbook Detecting brochure, which displays on its cover a typical private detecting secretary. This is a pneumatic young woman of excessive attributes who smiles fetchingly into the camera. From what the excellent text intimates, a successful private detective may have his pick from dozens of comely applicants for the position of private detecting secretary.

"I shall not be able to purchase a Chevrolet Camaro immediately," I say to Mr. Penney, "which is the customary transportation in my new trade, but I hope soon with the easing of credit restrictions and my own imminent business success to acquire one."

"You cretin!" roars Mr. Penney. Out in the rubber band shop people stop their work to look toward his office window. "You've been here eleven years and you still don't know the difference between a Number 8 narrow band and a Number 10 wide! Why, inside of a month you'll come crawling back here for your old job, and it might not be here, Digby! I might have found a twelve-year-old who is overqualified but willing to take it on! Why, I—"

There is more such unpleasantness which if I was to repeat it would only serve to tire you. I have been one of Mr. Penney's pets, to admit the truth, and I did not relish telling him the news of my departure, knowing as I did how ungracefully he would take it. He spits when he talks too fast.

The next day I move into my new office and become, officially, a private detecting agent. I am prouder than a peacock with quintuplets.

I choose my new quarters with care, as they must satisfy the complex requirements of the Matchbook Detecting Agent's Pocket Manual. I select an office in an older building (for economy's sake, see manual page 37), seventy years old, to be exact, and built of brick from the days when brick meant something, not a woman's figure if you follow me. The building is in a location (for easy access to my work environment, see page 112) that detecting sociologists call a "melting pot" district.

This spot is ideal. The block behind me holds the rich wheeler-dealers of the financial world who will be my clients. That avenue has jewelry stores, banks, investment houses, swank restaurants, ritzy clothing stores, and sundry other establishments catering to the monied elite. The block in front of my new office is home to the dregs of humanity, those who will form my natural opponents and who will in the months ahead grow to dread my fearless tread (manual, page 14). My location is urban renewal in all its glory. I pay the rent in advance and don't have enough left over for even the corpse of a sandwich.

"You can eat at the mission," says my fair Olive, observing just such an institution situated across the street from my new "digs." I suspect Olive fears my new career will lengthen our engagement beyond the six and one half years at which it already stands. "Olive," as I fondly call her, is a slender girl of scrawny dimensions who as I explicated prior-wise is the sole offspring of my landlady and is a particularly unmarried offspring at that.

"I point out to you, my dearest Olive, that, number one, the Fourth Avenue Mission of Faith only serves meals to the destitute and down on their luck, of which I can certainly not be one as long as I uphold the Private Detecting Code of Honor; and two, now that I have opened my office to the public, I am certain to begin my rapid rise as foretold in the Matchbook Detecting Agent's Pocket Manual, which I constantly refer to and trust."

"Huh" is her pithy reply. Olive has a rather negative streak to her, which is why we are a well matched couple, opposites attracting as they do.

I, on the other hand, am what the manual calls "an electric force of positive thinking." I am planning to rely on word of mouth throughout the city's financial district and underworld to bring me the business my talents deserve. "Once a success, you may pick your clients from among a clamoring multitude" (manual, page 346).

"Should you have complaints, Olive, regarding my choice of career," I say. "I suggest you bring them to your mother's attention, as I would not be availing myself of the growth job of the eighties as I am if it were not for the errand I undertook for her that fateful night, fetching her a fifth of medicinal brandy and her cigarettes, in the accidental acquisition of which the matchbook has benefited me so."

I glance through the sooty front window. "I believe," I say, "that word of mouth is about to deliver my first client."

A young woman of configuration enters. Olive sniffs like she does.

I give our visitor my last dollar.

"What is this?" asks this woman who is destined to be my first client.

I make a sweeping gesture of manliness, like the manual recommends. (First impressions mean everything.) "It is a custom in the private detecting business to award one's first client a dollar. I am Warner Digby, trained detecting agent. This is my new office and I am at your service."

My dear fiancée Olive says, "Warner, you big baboon, you've mucked it all up again! You're supposed to frame the first dollar you earn, not give one away! You're hopeless!" And with that broadside my fair fiancée Olive stalks out.

"I think it's a cute custom," says my visitor. She pockets my dollar.

"I must warn you, miss," I say, "my aim is to be the highest paid detecting agent in this city. Before I accept your commission you must be aware that my fees will be sizable . . . as will be my service to you."

"You mean you *really* have rented this old place?" she asks, drawing her finger in the dust of an ancient desk that sits in the center of the room. The real estate agent has confided to me that the last use of this property was very long ago, as a seedy race-booking establishment.

I draw myself erect. "Perhaps it is not much to look at today, but I intend to bring this old office to a high state of preparedness. I will install Venetian blinds so the late afternoon shadows will fall correctly upon the old brick walls; and that neon hotel sign across the street will add nicely to the evening atmosphere. I shall hire a buxom secretary who will wear silk stockings and when the official police are stumped they shall come to me for succor."

She observes me carefully. "What *exactly* did you say you do?" she asks.

"Why, I am a private detecting agent. I thought you-knew." I produce my special imitation-vinyl case, open it with a practiced flip (I have been practicing all morning), and display my official copper-plated badge.

"My!" she says with what I take to be admiration. "Badge Number 311 from the Matchbook Detecting School of Yuma, Arizona."

"You've heard of it?"

"Of course! Ask anyone in Yuma. All the tourists go there," she says. She smiles and laughs at me. What a nice young woman she is!

"I was an Honor Roll graduate," I admit with careful modesty. I can tell she is impressed.

"Now," I say, getting down to business, as I do not wish to be victim to dinner at the Fourth Avenue Mission of Faith, as my fair Olive has intimated, "what can I do for *you*?"

Just then a burly fellow carrying a pick and a shovel enters my office. I take him, from a long study of the manual and its chapter on criminal types and their distinguishing features, to be a ruffian. Curiously, he seems somehow to be acquainted with my client.

"Who's the mug?" he calls to her. "What a queer looking bird! What the — is he doon here?"

"You, sir, are a cad, speaking foul language in front of a lady and a citizen and my client." I step forward and, as the manual instructs, firmly present my fists.

"What the—" says the burl, as I plant my "hard left" directly on his chin. My knuckle gives a cracking noise and feels similar, but there is no other distinguishable result.

The burl apparently grasps a wall and flings it at me because I distinctly sense being struck by it twice. My client is talking rapidly. The burl backs off and I regain my feet. The burl and my client go into conference, which I join indiscreetly.

"This," says the girl, gesturing a thumb at me, "is Warner Digby, private eye. He's just finished a mail order course and has opened his office today."

"So?" says the burl.

"He rented *this* office, you thick-headed ape."

"This office?" says the burl.

"You got it. I think perhaps you ought to go out for a while."

He goes, along with his pick and his shovel.

"Is he a friend of yours?" I ask. She explains that she was once a secretary for a road contractor and she has gotten to know many of the laborers personally and happens to recognize this one when he inadvertently takes a wrong turn into my office.

"Oh," I say with sudden comprehension, "so *that's* why he has those sundry implements. He is a road worker. I could have sworn he is a criminal type. I hope I do not disremember my lessons so rapidly." I remove my manual from its pocket and flip through searching for the chapter on criminal types.

"I need your help, Mr. Digby," announces my client. I remember my difficulty regarding dinner and replace the manual.

"I am at your service."

She pauses a moment to think. "... It is my sister," she says.

"Of course. She has embezzled your inheritance? Or perhaps run off with the chauffeur?"

My client looks at me funny, as if I am a curious specimen. "Yes," she says finally, "how did you know?"

I smug my face. "Training," I say. "I could explain my chain of reasoning to you, if you would like. It will make the simplest deduction of the obvious seem overwhelmingly complex, and—"

"That won't be necessary," she says. "My sister has escaped with my inheritance and the family chauffeur, all that our dear father left us. We are the only children, you know, and our mother passed on years ago. How could Eileen do this to me?"

"When did you last see this harlot?" I ask probingly.

She considers. "This morning at breakfast. She had an airline ticket to Hawaii poking out of the pocket of her robe. Do you think that might mean something?"

"Yes," I say, "to a trained observer such as myself it reveals all. Not a minute to lose, Miss, uh—"

"Cheryl Thompson."

"Yes, Miss Thompson. Now, this may seem confusing to you, being as you are unversed in modern detecting science, but I must be off to the airport at once. Think hard now, and tell me: on your chance perusal of the ticket, did you notice which airline it was written for?"

"Uh... no."

"Rats! A setback! It means I'll have to cover both terminals. Oh well, I'm young, well trained, and therefore up to this task."

"My whole future lies in your hands," she says breathlessly.

I kiss her wrist, ever the gallant gentleman (manual, page 419),

and I rush off through the open door of my office. I am back in two jiffies. "How will I recognize your sister?" I ask.

"Uh . . . she looks just like me," says Miss Cheryl Thompson. "We're twins."

"Yes, I should have known." I run back out the door. Again I return to the office. "Say, Miss Thompson . . ." I inquire hesitantly, " . . . could you advance me bus fare?"

"Certainly," she says in that swell voice of hers. Birds must envy her. She hands me over five dollars. Cash.

I am already making money!

I return late that night. My client, Miss Thompson, is standing in the rear of my office conversing with the same burly man who has previously violated my premises. He has apparently put in a day of heavy labor on his road construction job, as he is covered with grime and is sweating profusely.

"Look here," I say to him firmly, "are you bothering my client?"

Miss Cheryl Thompson turns her generous eyes my way and says sweetly, "What? Who are . . . oh, it's you. How did you get on at the airport, Mr. Digby?"

I take her out of earshot of the tough looking burl and give her (as the manual recommends) an "encapsulated synopsis" of my day's activities on her behalf, including detailed observations and an expense account consisting of bus rides both ways and a strawberry milk shake.

" . . . anywhere in either terminal," I say. "I suspect your sister Eileen has fled the country, utilizing misdirection with a false airline ticket she permitted you to view, and is now in Mexico or another Latin hideaway where it will be difficult but not impossible to pursue her. 'The southern climes,'" I quote the manual, "'traditionally have offered safe haven to the criminal classes when they are forced to flee established authority.'"

"Look, honey," says the burl, addressing Miss Thompson while coming toward me in what I consider a menacing fashion, "let me take care of this mug my way."

As the Detecting Agent's Pocket Manual promises will happen in these situations, realization strikes me.

"You called her 'honey,'" I accuse the burl.

"That's nothing to what I'm about to call you," he growls.

I notice another clue. "Just a moment! What is this?" I demand of the burl. The rear of my office has been damaged. There is a

hole the size of a manhole cover in the flooring, and dirt is piled about. The burl's previously mentioned pick and shovel are present. I walk over and examine same. "What have you been burying?" I demand of him sternly.

"Burying?" He laughs heavily. "Why, that tunnel—"

"Shut up," interrupts Miss Thompson. "You talk too much."

The burl snarls something rude to her and jumps my way, drawing back a meaty fist to swing destruction at me. Fortunately, in his anger he steps on the blade of his own shovel, which he has left carelessly about, and the handle springs upward in violation of safety standards, tripping the burl. He falls and strikes his head on the brick wall and is momentarily dazed.

In a wink I have my handcuffs out and have attached same to one wrist of the burl, and the other end of the cuffs to one of the pipes of plumbing that run exposed down the left-hand wall of my old office.

In a moment he has regained his senses, but it is too late. "*What the —!*" roars the captured burl. He struggles and struggles, yet he cannot escape. My handcuffs are firmly holding him to the pipe and he is doomed.

"Now for you, Miss *Eileen* Thompson," I say to the woman.

"But . . . I'm your client. I'm *Cheryl* Thompson," she protests.

"Hah!" I respond. "Who do you think you're dealing with? Your little game is obvious."

"*Get the keys for these cuffs from the —!*" shouts the burl.

She obeys the burl and comes at me with evil intent. After a brief and disagreeable struggle (she is no match for me, of course), she finds herself bound by my second pair of handcuffs. I fasten her securely alongside her accomplice.

"You had no chance to get away with it," I lecture them. "Your scheme was transparent to me from the moment I returned."

"Whatever you think is going on," says the girl, "I can explain."

"Obviously," I say, "what has happened is that while I am on a wild goose chase at the airport, which was caused by your clever display of the false ticket at breakfast this morning, you two took advantage of my absence to sneak in here and place Miss Cheryl Thompson under bondage. I don't know yet where you've imprisoned her, but I'm confident I soon will discover that fact and I warn you both that if any harm has come to my client, the law will deal severely with you both."

"Listen to me," pleads the girl.

"No, you listen to me," I say. "You are Cheryl Thompson's twin sister Eileen and this ugly fellow here is your sweetheart, the family chauffeur. This morning when he entered, he struck such fear into Cheryl that she was afraid to reveal to me who he really was and therefore, terrified, she contrived the statement that he was a road worker of her acquaintance. He loitered around outside, and as soon as I departed for the airport, he kidnapped Cheryl so that you, her twin sister Eileen, could take her place. That is why when I returned just now you did not at first recognize me. You are not the same girl who was in here this morning. I, of course, knew at once because among other clues Cheryl is *much* prettier."

"You're nuts!" roars the burl.

"Am I?" I taunt him. "It was your own blunder of calling Eileen by the name 'honey' instead of 'Miss Thompson' or 'Cheryl' that allowed my deductive insight. Miss Cheryl Thompson would never allow a ruffian such as yourself to call her by the familiar name 'honey.' You revealed yourself, mister criminal!"

I walk over to where he is imprisoned. After a brief struggle I remove from his inside pocket a bulging sack. Further examination reveals it to be stuffed with various forms of jewelry.

"This," I say triumphantly, "is obviously the inheritance. Half wasn't enough for you, was it, Eileen? In your greed you craved Cheryl's share also."

I point to the hole in my floor and the dirt piled beside it. "You were burying the inheritance here until the heat blew over, eh? What safer place than under our noses? We'd have looked everywhere in the world except right here.

"Pretty clever," I allow. "It was a plan that would have fooled most detectives. But you two had the misfortune to go up against an Honor Roll graduate of the Matchbook Detecting School of Yuma, Arizona."

Detective Lieutenant Miller comes in, has a few whispered words with the beat cops (who arrived first), and then he examines the arrested parties. "All right," he says, "take them downtown and book them."

"We can't," complains one of the uniformed officers, "because those aren't our handcuffs. They're his," pointing an official finger at myself, "and *he* won't surrender the key. He's some kind of nut, lieutenant."

"You got that right, brother," says the burl, who is handcuffed

to the plumbing. "He's a regular looney-tune."

The lieutenant comes over and peruses me in a detecting way. "What's your name, sir?"

"I am Warner Digby," I say proudly, "trained graduate of the Matchbook Detecting School of Yuma, Arizona, at your service."

"Mmmm," says the lieutenant. "Do you know who it is that you have in your handcuffs there, Warner?"

"Certainly," I inform him. "That is Eileen Thompson and the Thompson family chauffeur. I have caught them red-handed absconding with the full inheritance that is rightfully shared by Eileen's sister Cheryl Thompson, the same who is now missing and whom I fear for the safety of. We *must* break their silence and force a confession regarding Cheryl Thompson's whereabouts, lieutenant! Until that is accomplished I will not unlock the handcuffs for which I have hidden the key. My client is in danger and I must consider her interests."

"I keep telling him there *ain't* no Cheryl Thompson," lies the chauffeur. "Sally here made it up to get him out of the office."

"Mmmm," repeats the lieutenant. He paces over to the rear wall and examines the pile of dirt, the shovel, and the pick.

"That's where they tunneled under and broke through to Chamberlain's Jewelry," says the first officer. "The ice they took still has Chamberlain's markings on the boxes."

The second officer says, "These old buildings have common walls, lieutenant, and the back of this office butts up against the back of the jewelry store. Walk around the sidewalk to Broadway and see for yourself, sir. I've been telling old Mr. Chamberlain for years that the circuit alarms on his front door and windows aren't enough. He really needs a motion detector and—"

"Yes, yes," says the lieutenant, waving his hand. "Wait out front, will you, boys?" The two uniformed cops depart. I naturally assume that Lieutenant Miller intends to consult me and is too proud to let mere uniformed officers observe.

"I am at your disposal, sir," I tell him politely. The manual (page 222) suggests a mock-submissive tone in these situations, for his comfort. It isn't easy for a veteran police detective to admit an amateur is his superior; and I am always willing to allow accommodations to his pride, if such are possible without jeopardy to the case.

I give the lieutenant a complete rundown of my day's activities. Lieutenant Miller removes his spectacles and vigorously rubs his

hand over his eyes and face. I suppose he has been through a tough day and is tired.

"Warner," he says to me finally, "these two people locked to your toilet are Cincinnati Phil and his girlfriend Sally. They're wanted from here to the Coast for more than two dozen jewelry store heists.

"I don't know who you think these two are or what you think is going on," continues the lieutenant, "but we need your cooperation. The police department is *asking* for your cooperation. I promise you on my badge as a lieutenant of detectives that if you release them to us you can have all the credit. Think about it, Warner—your name would be in the paper tomorrow—might even make the TV news."

"The safety of my client's interests is all the credit I require," I say, quoting directly from the Private Detecting Code of Honor.

"Mmmm. . . . Look here, Warner, maybe I could put in a word with old Mr. Chamberlain. When he gets his jewelry back and is told that *you* were the one who single-handedly recovered it, I'm sure he'll be willing to shell out a nice reward," he says. "Just give me the key to the handcuffs, Warner!"

"I'm sorry," I say, "but you are mistaken. These criminals are Eileen Thompson and her family chauffeur. They are sweethearts and they have absconded with the family inheritance that is by rights half owned by Eileen's sister, Miss Cheryl Thompson. Must I draw you a picture, lieutenant?" The manual warns that the official detectives will sometimes be a little slow on the uptake.

I walk back over to my prisoners. I slap the burl across his face. "I knew you were a criminal type the first time I saw you," I say. "I'm asking you one more time, *where* is Cheryl Thompson?"

"Lieutenant," cries the dastardly Eileen, "keep him away from us! He's crazy!"

"Yeah," says the burl, "I don't think he's even got a license. We got our rights, don't we?"

"Is this true, Warner?" asks the lieutenant. "Have you been practicing without a license?"

"Certainly not!" I ejaculate. In a fit of pique I produce my genuine copper-clad Matchbook Detecting School badge. "See!" I cry defiantly. "I am a trained detecting operative!"

Lieutenant Miller glances from the badge to me to the badge and et cetera. Then he does that thing again where he takes his glasses off and vigorously rubs his hand over his eyes and face. "Brrr," he says, which is an odd thing to say, as it is not cold.

"Look," he says almost gently, "in this state you have to apprentice to a qualified detective or have equivalent government experience for a period of not less than three years before you can even apply for a private detective's license. Have you done that, Warner?"

"The correspondence course didn't mention that requirement," I admit.

The lieutenant goes on, "You see, Warner, you have to be licensed before you can legally work at this game. Why, they can fine you up to five thousand dollars, son!"

I am quite impressed by this information. "You wouldn't report me, would you, lieutenant?"

"I will," says the burl quickly. "Lieutenant, I wanna file a complaint against this guy."

This brings a quick response from Detective Lieutenant Miller. "I'll tell you what you're going to do, Cincinnati Phil. You and your girlfriend Sally are going to go downtown and make a complete confession to us, and you're going to sign it in front of witnesses. Or else . . ."

"Or else what, cop?"

" . . . I'll leave you here and let Warner beat the whereabouts of Eileen's sister Cheryl out of you."

"Let me at them, lieutenant!" I say. "I'm your man!"

"Okay, okay!" shouts the burl quickly. You can see how the criminal types fear a man of resolve such as myself.

The lieutenant takes me aside: "C'mon Warner, if you give me the keys to those cufflinks, I'll forget all about your, uh, licensing difficulties. What do you say? I promise we'll rescue Miss Cheryl Thompson and take care of her interests. You don't need to be involved further, and I'll have a word first thing tomorrow with old Mr. Chamberlain about your reward."

So that's the way we decide to work it, Lieutenant Miller and me.

The next afternoon I pull up in front of my rooming house in a brand spanking used 1969 Chevrolet Camaro. It has mag wheels on the driver's side and plaid seat covers all around.

This new vehicle will be extremely useful, as I intend in the months ahead to be excessively busy in my new profession. Word of mouth from old Mr. Chamberlain's satisfied lips must inevitably bring me desperate citizens from the monied classes,

séeeking my services for recourse of their grievances and solution of their mysteries.

I interpret my agreement with Detective Lieutenant Miller to mean that I now have official permission to proceed in my profession without the formality of licensing by the state. Being unlicensed is an advantage I expect will allow me to move unhindered and unrecognized among the criminal classes while I hunt transgressors.

"Oh, Warner!" shrieks my loyal Olive when she hears of the twenty-one-hundred-dollar check I have just received from old Mr. Chamberlain. "Now we can get *married!*"

Our landlady, who is also Olive's mother and my soon-to-be mother-in-law, is beaming happily and even allows as how I may kiss her (my mother-in-law-to-be is meant) on her wrinkled old cheek. This is not among my lists of desires, but I yield to her wishes for the sake of harmony in the family.

There is still one matter to finish. "You will recall that yesterday," I say severely to Olive, "you made a rude suggestion about my potential income as a trained detecting agent. You inferred I will soon be forced to take my meals among the destitute at the Fourth Avenue Mission of Faith.

"Quite the opposite, however, has occurred. I have been, as you can see, Olive, quite successful, and to impress this fact upon you more fully, I desire to take you out to a fine meal tonight. Wear your best dress and be on the front steps at seven P.M."

The Camaro, my fiancée, and I depart promptly at the appointed hour. Olive wears a pink gown of breathtaking rigidity.

You guessed it, I take her to dine at the Fourth Avenue Mission of Faith. There it is "stew night" and while I personally enjoy the modest meal, I sense that Olive, dressed to the teeth, finds the situation a bit humbling and thus learns a valuable lesson.

(... As the Matchbook Detecting Agent's Pocket Manual, Chapter 23, "Spousal Relations," page 514, recommends.)

MAIDEN IN DISTRESS

by
Mike Cohen

“You’re worried about something,” Lucy said.

Hugh Berry flinched at the challenge in her tone, the ring of accusation. He was rattled, as always, by the ease with which she backed him into defensiveness.

“Something at the office,” Lucy said, hanging in there.

Lucy had visited the New York offices of Moody Mills no more than half a dozen times in

the twelve years Hugh had worked there. “How come you know all these things about my office?” he said. “What makes you so damn smart?”

“A lifetime of devotion.” Lucy laid a bony finger on his arm, a rare signal of affection. “I’m your wife. I’m concerned about the stresses of big business.”

“I’m not big business. I’m just a salesman.”

“Then that’s it, isn’t it? I put my hand right on it. You’re not



a kid any more, you realize that."

"I'm forty years old. All right, I'm not a kid. But I'm not so old, either."

"Forty years, you're just a salesman. Still. So that's the trouble. That's the stress. Am I right? Tell me I'm right." Lucy Berry glared at her husband triumphantly.

"I'm only a salesman, true. But it's not the problem you think it is. I like it this way.

Getting a promotion, making sales manager, *that* would be a problem."

"A promotion would be a problem?"

"It wouldn't be easy. Look at Harry Appleby, Timothy Moody always on his back. Harry's old before his time. It made him sick. It's why he's taking early retirement."

"Harry's retiring?"

"It's retire or die. That's what his doctor said."

"So there is stress. A chance for promotion. And you didn't tell me. Why?"

"You're so damned smart, you know it all, I figured you knew that, too."

Lucy Berry's mouth sucked into a lipless pucker. "You were afraid to tell me. You're so sure you won't get the job you won't even try, you come up with excuses even before you fizzle."

"I just told you, I don't want a promotion. I like it where I am. What's wrong with that?"

"You want it all right. You can't fool me, Hugh; I know you like a book. You're making excuses because you're afraid you won't get it; you think you're not man enough. All right, we'll see about that. Both of us together, team play, we'll show them." Lucy shoved the supper dishes aside, opening a field of fire between them. "Let's figure our strategy." She cocked her head, twisted her narrow face into what she fancied was a vixen smile. "I'm your wife, honey, your partner for life, for better or worse, till death us do part; I'll help you."

"I don't want and I don't need your help—" Hugh stammered unconvincingly.

She shook off his protestations, smothered his words with her own: "Who's the competition?"

"What competition?"

"Wake up, for heaven's sake.

You know. I'm talking about our lives, our future. My husband, sales manager. Wait till I stick that to those fancy snobs in this town. So all right, first we plan. The new sales manager at Moody Mills is going to be you."

"Unless it's Benny Carlton."

"He's just a salesman. Forget him."

"I'm a salesman."

"You've been there longer."

"That doesn't always count."

"Never mind Carlton," she

said. "A lightweight. Who else?"

"Joe Shapiro. Tommy Hilton." Hugh Berry shook his head, corrected himself. "No, it wouldn't be either one of those, I'm sure of that."

"So who?"

"Sidney Penrose, maybe."

"Who's Sidney Penrose?"

Hugh Berry thought about the question, thought about the answer, found just the right words. "Also in sales," he said.

"New?"

"Sort of."

"So again, you've been there longer."

"As I said, that may not count."

"Special, huh?"

Hugh Berry nodded. "Very special. Teacher's pet. Timothy J. Moody thinks Sidney Penrose is a real winner. And you know what? He's right. Sidney Penrose is—let's say—different."

Lucy stood up, rested her fingertips on the table's edge. She considered the problem, scanned the options; one course alone was open.

"Get rid of him," she ordered.

Hugh Berry sat at the desk in his tiny, windowless carrel and contemplated what he had to do. It was obvious to Hugh that his know-it-all wife didn't know everything. Actually, this time, she almost didn't know anything. Because with Sidney Penrose, the answer couldn't be, "Get rid of him."

It wasn't as if Lucy had ordered a murderous hit. There was only a corporate promotion at stake. It wasn't like a gangland franchise for stealing rights to three countries. Lucy wasn't talking about homicide—heaven forbid—she was ordering an action of a gentler nature, a ploy which, while not quite of brag-gable character, was accepted every day as part of the tactics of civilized economic pushing and shoving. Lucy was, without pinpointing for her husband the precise details of the deed, advocating the kind of bloodless backstabbing Hugh had seen take place in the past in society in general and in this very corporation in particular.

Hugh remembered telling Lucy about Harry Appleby's deft handling of one Larry

Saunders, an up and coming sales whiz whose rocketlike rise flamed out when Saunders was caught in a messy motel scandal with an important customer's wife. It was never proved that the assassination of Saunders' career was the contrivance of Appleby, but conviction by gossip requires none of the byzantine legalisms of a court-controlled jury of one's peers. The assassin in the Appleby/Saunders case got off with a chuckle of acceptance; but the victim paid full price for his appearance of guilt. Hugh recalled, too, the case of Wilbur Wollygrunch who had been tempted into and then trapped at embezzlement. And there was the now departed Oliver Greenfield, whom Hugh Berry himself blushing-ly remembered having led into a known orgy on the eve of a critical vendor-customer conference.

So now Sidney Penrose was rising too fast, threatening, among others, Hugh Berry—or, more accurately, Hugh Berry's wife. Well, Lucy Berry may have been clever. She may have been a tricky tactician. But one thing Lucy wasn't, was aware of what she was up against. Because Lucy believed that in planning Sidney Penrose's downfall it was once again a matter of going after just one of the guys.

Which was not the case at all.

Sidney Penrose was not somebody you could ambush with a customer's wife in a cheap motel or get drunk on a night out with the boys. You couldn't because, as Hugh Berry well knew, and sitting at this moment in his tiny office could plainly see by looking at the figure in his doorway, Sidney Penrose was not one of the boys at all. Sidney was a woman, a young one, fair of face, fetching of form.

"Hey, Hugh," Sidney Penrose said, "I've got another problem. Did I come to the right place again?"

Normally pleased and flattered by Sidney's confidentiality, Hugh now squirmed uncomfortably. He was no longer her friend and ally; now the game was different: she was in his way now, he had to shoot her down.

Hugh did what this new game called for. Needing to maintain her confidence until the time came to use it, he gave her his old grin of friendship, said: "Throw it at me, I'll try."

In unsuspecting innocence, Sidney sighed with relief. "I called on Sam Cinders this morning," she said. "I ran into him in his lobby. He seemed mad; walked right by me, said he was tied up. Zip, zip, good-bye. Why?"

"Well, those things happen. People get busy—"

"But why would he be mad?"

I broke my neck for him last week, begged and pleaded with production, got his shipment out four days early. All last week, Cinders had me on the phone, I said I couldn't help him. But I tried. And I did it. Cinders' goods were delivered at eight o'clock this morning. Just what he wanted. So tell me why he's mad, what did I do wrong?"

"Did you call him Friday?" Hugh asked.

"Call him? I did better than that, I got the goods out."

"Did he know it?"

"I did what he wanted. He knows it now."

"After worrying about it all weekend. And not knowing what he was going to cut come Monday morning. You could have given him a pleasant weekend; instead, you let him sweat."

Sidney Penrose compressed her pretty face into a frown. "Wow," she said. "Stupid, right? Of course. Hugh, do you think I'll ever learn?"

"You're learning."

"Slow, slow."

"It's coming."

"With your help. I really appreciate it, Hugh, don't think I don't. I lean on you. You're a real friend. Everything I know about this business I learned from you."

Hugh watched her walk away, noted the determined lift of her head, the neatly cushioned see-

saw of her trim rear end. She sure did ask a lot of questions. But she was bright; whatever it was, she never asked the same thing twice. If Hugh wanted Appleby's job, Sidney Penrose was opposition to be reckoned with.

Well, Hugh wanted the job, he really did. But Sidney was so damned nice he hated himself for what he was going to have to do.

If he could figure out a way to do it.

“It's two weeks,” Lucy said.

Hugh had been expecting this. He gulped. A lump of beef escaped his teeth, slid through the open hatch till it reached his windpipe, stopped. He gasped and thrashed his arms as the mass jammed the passageway. He coughed, then coughed again, finally worked the blockage free. “Two weeks till what?” he managed to say, his throat sore, his eyes in tears.

Lucy Berry ignored the fact that her husband had nearly choked to death. Yielding to a play for sympathy would only encourage self-pity. She pushed ahead with the line of questioning she had been planning for him all afternoon. “Not two weeks *till*. It's two weeks *since*. We decided you were going to take care of that Penrose guy.

What happened?”

“It's not that easy.”

“It's not that hard. Not if you put your mind to it.”

“Sidney Penrose is a decent person.”

“A decent person! What's decent got to do with it? Are you a decent person? Am I a decent person? What is this, business or charity? Who pays you that lousy salary, Timothy J. Moody or Goodwill Industries? Don't you believe in capitalism and survival of the fittest?”

Hugh separated a small portion of meat from the main mass, trimmed its gristle, then pushed it to one side. He felt no desire to eat. And he felt no desire to speak. Well, Lucy was taking care of the speaking, she'd tell him when it was his turn.

She was explaining now the rising cost of groceries and the stagnant figure on his salary check. She informed him that the country was built on ambition, on the striving of strong men and the pushing of pioneer women. Lucy's eyes were glazing over now; soon she'd realize she had strayed from her subject and Hugh knew the prologue was drawing to a close. Any moment now she'd snap back from her digression and order him to speak. Sooner or later he'd have to tell her. Maybe if he tried the meat again, he'd tell her with one breath and

choke to death with the next one. No such luck. Hugh cleared his voice.

"There's something I didn't tell you," he said.

"There's a lot you didn't tell me."

"About Sidney Penrose, I mean."

"I'll say there is. What are you doing about him? The least you can do is take him out and get him drunk. Fix him up in a motel with a woman."

"Sidney Penrose *is* a woman."

Lucy's mouth moved, but silently, as her brain groped for words of sufficient amplitude. "A woman! My God! I'll say you didn't tell me. What kind of woman?" Now Lucy found the words she wanted. "What kind of strumpet? What else don't I know? Are you and this woman making out?"

"No, no, nothing like that."

"I don't believe you. Is she ugly?"

"I don't know. I never particularly noticed."

"All men notice."

"Well, I can't say she's what you'd call real ugly."

"Is she what you'd call real pretty? How old is she? What about her figure?"

"Look." Hugh dumped his fork on his plate with a clatter. "She's only a kid. She's in her twenties."

"That sounds pretty to me."

"I'm a married man."

"Oh, my." Sarcasm now.

Weaseling around, Hugh could see, wasn't going to get him out of it. Lucy wasn't going to be convinced by protestations of chivalry or virtue. Women were in business now, competing as equals with men. So they were entitled to be treated as equals. And if a situation arose where a man would be stabbed in the back by his best friend, and if instead of a man you had a woman, why then, in all fairness, stab her:

"In my mind," Lucy said, "I draw a picture; tinsel pretty, cheap and blonde, tight red dress, pointy in front and round behind."

"No, no, she's not like that."

"So you don't notice, ha?"

"So what if I do? She works at the company like everybody else. That's all. I don't have a thing to do with her."

"Who said you do? A beauty like her, a moose like you." Out of her own maundering, Lucy plucked the answer. "Not you? Of course. Of course. She's after Timothy J. Moody, that's who. She wants that promotion. And she'll get it, too. Unless somebody does something smart enough to stop her."

Hugh Berry and his wife clashed eyelocks across the supper dishes. Outstared, finally, Hugh wilted. "What do you suggest?"

"Suggest? You want me to

tell you what to do and let you foul it up? Can I trust you to do what's needed when a pretty girl's involved? You know what I think? I think you're on her side: be nice to her, maybe she'll give a little. Well, never mind. Something needs to be done all right, but not by you. I'll figure out the treatment for that doxy!"

Sidney was at his office door, cute as a pussy cat, whispering low a cry for help. "I'm in trouble," she said. "Can we talk?"

Shocked, silently Hugh thought: Trouble? Not by me; by who? Aloud he said: "Oh, my God!"

"Not trouble like that. Nothing I did. Trouble like something somebody said. Something that isn't true."

Bennie Carlton was coming down the hall. "Lunch," Hugh whispered hurriedly. "Danny's Deli on 49th at twelve thirty." He flipped a hand, telling her to beat it. Discreetly, she did.

Hugh wasn't enjoying his corned beef sandwich. He hated to see a woman cry. When the woman was with him and crying, it was even worse. What if somebody who knew him came in and saw them together, Hugh Berry and this lovely maiden in distress, what would they think? Right; Hugh knew exactly what they'd think.

"Why would anybody say things that are so untrue?" Sidney asked.

"I don't know," Hugh said, nibbling unenthusiastically at the crust of a bread slice.

"I've never even been alone with Mr. Moody."

"You have, in his office."

"Oh, that. Everybody has, one time or another."

"Well, then."

Sidney looked at him, surprised and disappointed. "What are you trying to prove, Hugh? That the accusations are true?"

"Certainly not. But don't claim too much. If they catch you in a mistake, they'll label you a liar. And if they can show you're a liar—well—you know—"

Sidney nodded. "Well, okay, I get your point. Mr. Moody's office, sure. But always with the door open. And nothing like what Mrs. Moody said."

"Mr. Moody's been known to grab at a girl now and then. Are you sure he didn't grab at you?"

"Of course I'm sure."

"He never even tried?"

"All right, he tried. It's very humiliating, even though I never let him. It's insulting."

Hugh fidgeted in his seat, turned the conversation to another course. "What exactly did Mrs. Moody say?" he asked.

"Just what I told you. It started like any telephone conversation. She asked if I was

Miss Penrose, Miss Sidney Penrose, and I said I was. I thought she was a customer and I was very polite. Then, out of the blue, she called me a harlot and told me she was Mrs. Timothy J. Moody, la de da, and she had just been anonymously contacted by a concerned party with the suggestion that she intervene to effect the discontinuance of my affair with her husband. She had a letter, she said, she read to me from the letter. Whoever wrote the letter was even nastier than the words Mrs. Moody could think up on her own. Also she said that if I had my heart set on the sales manager job, her advice to me was to resign at once because she would see to it that I never, never got that promotion." Sidney shook her head. "Hugh," she said, "was I in line for that promotion?"

Hugh nodded. "Right on top."

"And now?"

"Forget it."

Somewhere during his discourse, Sidney had stopped crying. Now she started again.

Hugh stormed into the house, looking for his wife. It was a small house and Lucy's usual place at this hour was in the kitchen and when Hugh got home, that was where he looked and there she was.

"You wrote a stinkin' letter

to Mrs. Moody," Hugh said.

"Aha!" Lucy Berry said, lighting up. "Something happened."

"You told a bunch of lies. You made the poor kid cry."

"Oh, my. So I made her cry. What else? Did she quit?"

"You have no heart. How could you do it?"

"Did she quit?" Lucy still wanted to know.

"No, she didn't quit. She needs the job, she needs the money."

"Isn't that too bad. So she needs the money. Well, who doesn't? I take it she was insulted good and proper?"

"She sure was."

"If she had any pride, insulted like that, obviously not wanted, she'd quit. She's a worse slut than I thought she was."

"I can't believe my own wife would do a thing like this," Hugh said.

Lucy set her stirring spoon on the side of the stove, turned to study her husband. "Well, listen to Mr. Clean," she said at last, "posturing like a saint. You wouldn't do a thing like that, would you? All virtue, aren't you? Well, I happen to remember one Oliver Greenfield, your best friend, a nice young man with a wife and two kids and you took him out and got him drunk and got him fired—"

"You made me do it!"

"I made you do it? Are you

that gutless, my husband? No will of your own? Blame it on me? A little hundred-and-two pound woman can push you around? Well, how much does your Miss Sidney Sweetie-pie weigh, to push you around at risk of destruction of your home and sacrifice of your career?"

"All right, all right. Enough."

"Enough what? Don't you want the promotion?"

"Of course I do."

"Enough to keep that floozie from stealing it from you?"

"She's not a floozie. But that's beside the point. The point is that you and your letter, you didn't do me one damn little bit of good."

"You mean because she's still there? You wait. Wait till Mr. Timothy J. Moody gets back from London, when Mrs. Timothy J. Moody gets hold of him. So the drab won't quit, ha? He'll fire her two seconds after his wife sticks him with that letter."

"That letter," Hugh Berry ruminated. He shook his head. "Your dumb letter will have exactly zero effect on Mr. Moody. You think you're dealing with a husband and wife relationship like you and me? You think Mrs. Moody is anything like Mrs. Berry, pushing her milktoast husband around? The Timothy Moody I see in the office is Attila the Hun. If he's only one tenth as rough at

home, that's enough. He'll tell that wife of his to get out of his business and stay out. And that'll be that. Your lousy letter didn't put me not one single inch closer to promotion. So let me be tough like Mr. Moody for one reckless second, and while the courage is with me, let me tell you the same thing: get out of my business and stay out!"

More surprised than threatened, Lucy was silent. If what Hugh had said about the Moodys was true—and there was no reason to believe it wasn't—then indeed her letter had been a wasted effort. Sidney Penrose had been a barrier to Hugh's advancement before. Now she was still a barrier; nothing had changed.

But Hugh knew something Lucy didn't know: from his meeting with Sidney in the deli today, Hugh knew that Sidney was still convinced that she was in trouble.

So there, without saying anything to Lucy, was Hugh's big chance: by taking advantage of Sidney's confusion, he could wipe her out and nail down the promotion for himself. And by accomplishing this without obvious help from Lucy, he could also establish himself as master in his own household. Serendipity!

Serendipity, shmerendipity. First he had to figure out how to do it.

“All things being equal, I’d rather buy from you,” the customer said.

“So make yourself happy,” Hugh Berry said. “Give me the order.”

“I’d like to, I’d really like to. But all things are *not* equal. Plover Mills wants this business awfully bad.”

“What does that mean?”

“As if you didn’t know.”

“Price?” Hugh Berry guessed.

The buyer rocked his chair back on its swivel, rested a heel on the corner of his desk. He nodded.

“How much?” Hugh asked.

“How much cheaper can you go?”

“I can’t go cheaper. But if it’s sensible, maybe I can match it.”

“Just match it? What do I need you for? I’ve already got a price from Plover.”

The phone rang. The man answered, listened. He hung up. To Hugh: “Look, I’ve got to run out back; a little problem, five, ten minutes. Can you wait?”

Hugh had another appointment. He blinked indecisively.

“Look,” the man said, “don’t force me to do business with that punk from Plover. Think it over, work it out. You be reasonable, I’ll be reasonable. Just five minutes. You can wait.” He smiled reassuringly.

“Till hell freezes over. I’ll be here.”

The buyer walked out, leaving Hugh alone.

From long and sometimes profitable practice, Hugh studied the papers on the customer’s desk. The first thing a salesman has to learn, someone had once told him, is to read upside down. But this desk was neat, there wasn’t much on it; a black plastic folder, closed; a production schedule, irrelevant; an out box, an in box, and a file box, all showing technical papers of no interest.

Hugh’s eye drifted to the wastebasket. He recognized instantly the letterhead of his competitor: J.R. Plover Mills. Reaching with his foot, Hugh moved the bucket till the words of the letter faced him. It was a form letter announcing the opening of a new finishing plant; old news; Hugh had seen the letter elsewhere. He was about to toe the wastebasket back to its original position when a thought struck him, impelled him.

Quickly Hugh leaned forward, thrust out a hand, snatched the Plover letter, and all in the same furtive move, stuffed it into concealment in his briefcase.

Hugh didn’t risk using the copying machine in the Moody Mills office. Instead, he stopped at a “Mirror Mirror” shop, paid the fifteen cent fee, and had the J.R. Plover Mills letterhead

transferred to a blank sheet of paper.

At home that evening, Hugh composed a letter on a yellow pad, edited and reworked it till finally, satisfied with what he had produced, he typed it carefully, neatly, onto his sheet of Plover Mills stationery. He addressed the envelope, sealed it, affixed a stamp and, before second thoughts could intervene, jogged down to the corner and dropped it irretrievably in the mailbox.

Two days later, Sidney Penrose slid a letter across the table in the deli that was becoming their secret trysting place. Before he even saw it, Hugh knew that his chicken had come home to roost.

"Imagine," Sidney said, "a letter from Plover Mills. A letter, in fact, from Mr. J.R. Plover himself. Read all the great things he says about me. How does he know? Isn't it stupendous?"

Hugh pretended to study the letter and then, carefully concealing his pride of authorship, read aloud some of the better parts: "... have been observing with admiration your progress in the market ... glowing customer reports ... exactly the sort of person we need to strengthen known weak spots in our organization ... substantial increase over your present salary ... sales man-

ager position coming open soon ... vice presidency ..."

Hugh dropped the letter on the table. "Wow," he said, hoping the uncontrollable smirk on his face wasn't giving him away.

Sidney was too excited to notice. "What do I do now?" she asked.

"First things first. Boy, this is great! First, you take care of Mrs. Moody. Tomorrow when the boss gets back from London, you march right in and with the door open and good and loud, you tell him about his wife's abusive phone call. You lay it on heavy. Then you get to him. You bring up all his low-class behavior. You call him a few choice names. You demand he make his wife apologize and the same for him. Of course they'll do no such thing. You demand a promotion and a salary increase. Those won't happen, either. But what do you care? You've salvaged your honor. You've told off the boss for his wife's insults and made public his own lecherous passes. And after that, you'll march down the street and take a higher paying job with Plover. It's the opportunity every wage slave daydreams about but none of us ever gets.

"Word will get around," Hugh went on. "You'll be the hero of the industry and what have you got to lose? Plover loves you. You've got that great new job,

that opportunity and all that money just waiting for the taking."

Riding home that evening, Hugh rehashed recent events in a debate with his conscience. His conscience lost. Hugh's responsibility, he told himself, was to himself and his home, not to the career of a young and flirty tart. Sidney had been pumping him for instruction in business practices; he knew what she was after. She was ambitious, it was her or him. And even if she never figured out where the spurious Plover Mills letter came from, still, here was more of just what she was asking for, this unforgettable lesson on the value of faith and trust in the world of business.

By the time Hugh arrived at home, his conscience was fully persuaded, had agreed to go along. Here was a man who had done his duty. He greeted his wife cheerfully, even hugged her. He started to kiss her, but duty is only duty; enough is enough.

With Sidney Penrose out of the way, Hugh Berry got the sales manager job at Moody Mills. Sidney, of course, was greeted with derision when she presented the counterfeit letter at J.R. Plover Mills; they threw

her out. But when the Plover management heard how she had humiliated their hated rival, Timothy J. Moody, they reconsidered, called her back. They saw that the young lady was presentable, knowledgeable, and poised. And they offered her a deal close to the one described in the letter.

So with Hugh promoted and Sidney gainfully employed, we have our main characters taken care of and this should be our happy ending.

Unfortunately, however, the world of business is built on competition and with Sidney combining her own considerable talents with all she had learned from Hugh, Plover Mills began to sweep Moody Mills out of all its market strongholds. Timothy J. Moody became disenchanted with Hugh as sales manager and as the weeks and months went by, Hugh's position with Moody grew more and more tenuous.

At the same time, Sidney's position with Plover grew steadily stronger.

But if Hugh was worried, well, he didn't show it. Sidney Penrose was now vice president for sales at Plover Mills and if Hugh needed a job, he could always ask her, couldn't he? She got where she was because of him, didn't she? It figured she owed him something, didn't it?

FICTION

Randy Sea: The Prime Suspect



by
Percy Spurlark Parker

Illustration by Stuart Weiss

125

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It'd been raining most of the day. A late summer rain that brings the muggy smell of the lake right to you, like someone has dumped last week's garbage over your head. And, as usual on days like this, I get to work outside.

Well, I wasn't exactly out in the elements. I was cooped up in my car keeping tabs on the townhouse a quarter block down where Don Harmond was entertaining Mrs. Felicia Toliver.

"My wife is cheating on me and I want you to find out who with," Carl Toliver said to me five days ago.

He was a barrelchested gent. Dark curls flowed into heavy sideburns. He had a shaggy, uneven mustache, wore thick-framed glasses, and spoke with a cigar tucked in the corner of his mouth, his tone harsh and graveled.

I'm Randy Sea, private investigator, and my working day is filled with just such requests.

"Are you sure your wife's being unfaithful?"

He nodded, the flat panes of his glasses reflecting the ceiling light. "I'm sure, and it's been going on for some time. As soon as you get me the evidence, I'm seeking a divorce."

"I don't knock down bedroom doors and snap pictures," I said. "I can follow her, give you a full report on where she goes, who

she sees, and how long she stays."

"That'll be sufficient."

"Just wanted you to know. And, it'll be a hundred and a quarter a day plus expenses."

I charge what the traffic will allow. The newness of Toliver's dark blue three piece told me one twenty-five wouldn't make him flinch. I was right. He went in his pocket and counted out five one hundred dollar bills without hesitation.

"Where can I get in touch?" I asked.

"I'll contact you. I'll be out of town until Friday anyway. I'll be here Saturday morning for your report and with the balance of whatever else I might owe you."

Toliver gave me a description of his wife and the make and license number of her car, and I got to work the next day.

She was a busy lady. Tuesday morning she visited three fashionable clothing boutiques and an art gallery. She had lunch at the Food Spa, a health food place on the north side, with a group calling themselves Women for a Cleaner Life. She'd left there and gone directly to the townhouse and the waiting arms of a man I later learned was Don Harmond.

She'd followed generally the same pattern the rest of the week. The shops and restau-

rants were different, but she always wound up at the townhouse, wrapped in a long embrace with Harmond before going inside.

I'd called a friend, Stella Moore, gossip columnist these days for the *Courier*, and with her help I managed a small profile on Harmond. His was a local-boy-makes-good story. He was a graduate of the Carr College theater group. Writing was more to his liking than acting, and in the last six years he had four successful plays to his credit.

They made a complementary couple wrapped in their embrace, she blonde and thin, he tall and trim. I had a hard time pairing her and Toliver in my mind, though. Sure, people marry for more reasons than how well they look together on an eight by ten glossy. Toliver was a successful businessman and had the bucks to prove it. But there was something of a truck driver air about him. He and Felicia weren't exactly Beauty and the Beast, but they were close.

On Friday, Felicia followed her normal routine and was back home by seven. I got back to the office and started putting the report together.

Toliver arrived exactly at ten the next morning. It was as if he'd walked out of one door and

back through another. He was wearing the same suit he had on Monday, the same shirt and tie. I've had clients who've done stranger things.

He puffed on his cigar rather than inhaling, the smoke throwing shadows over the flat panes of his glasses. "Well?" he barked. I handed him the report and he took it without sitting, began leafing through it, the muscles tightening in his jaws.

"I knew it," he finally said. "The tramp. Are you married, Mr. Sea?"

"No, I've never come close."

"Take my advice and stay that way."

We settled the rest of my fee, again in cash, and he took the report and left without another word.

It was one of those rare times in my life when I had a pocket full of money and a free weekend. I called a law intern I knew who was fond of chilled champagne and late fifties rock.

Tuesday started out like most mornings for me, at Mick's, the lounge on the first floor of my office building. Harry Duggan, Mick's owner, can pour a hundred-proof eye opener or the city's meanest cup of coffee with the same practiced ease. This morning, I was trying the coffee, and talking up my weekend.

DARK DEEDS BY THE DOZEN!

In fact, more than two dozen chilling tales
fill the pages of
**ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S
BORROWERS OF THE NIGHT.**

Bill Pronzini, Lawrence Block,
Ron Goulart, and Donald E. Westlake
are among the authors who intrigue, thrill,
and baffle you
in the masterful Hitchcock tradition.

To join them in their shady realm,
just return the coupon today.
But don't forget to bring your flashlight!

ALFRED HITCHCOCK ANTHOLOGY #19
P.O. BOX 999
Ridgefield, N.J. 07657

Please RUSH my copy of ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S
BORROWERS OF THE NIGHT. I have enclosed
\$3.95, (postage and handling included).

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

STATE _____

ZIP _____

"You sound like you're the only guy who's ever had a date," Harry cracked.

"I'm willing to concede other people have gone on dates. But there's no way they could've matched this one."

Harry shook his head. "I've got to meet this law intern of yours. The woman must have a serious character flaw."

Bhock, who runs the newsstand in the lobby, came in just then. He tossed a couple of copies of the *Courier* on the counter, waved, and stiff-legged it out of the joint on his club foot.

The paper was lying face up, the heavy print of its lead stories beckoning, and my alarm button went off.

LOVERS SLAIN, HUSBAND QUESTIONED

I scanned the story, looking for the names first, and they were there: Harmond, Felicia and Carl Toliver. Felicia and Harmond were found in the bedroom of his townhouse. Harmond's business agent had discovered the bodies when he'd gone to Harmond's for a meeting last night and found the door ajar.

They had both been shot several times, and no murder weapon was found at the scene. The cops had pulled Toliver in, but later released him pending

further investigation.

That meant me. The cops would want to know about my tailing Felicia last week. It would give them another set of questions to throw at Toliver. And it made me do some rethinking about my business.

Toliver looked a little rough around the edges, but I hadn't pegged him as the murdering type. Yet Felicia and Harmond were dead, and I'd pointed the finger.

I turned to page three for the rest of the story. There was a photo of Harmond dressed in a tuxedo, attending the opening of one of his plays. And there was a photo of Felicia and Carl Toliver at a fund-raiser held last month. The Tolivers were sitting at a dining table and had stopped to look up at the camera. It was a pleasant pose, the smiles weren't forced, it fared well for togetherness and good times. The problem I was having, though, was that the Carl Toliver in the photo wasn't the same Carl Toliver who'd come to my office.

"He could've hired someone," Sergeant Joe Thornhill said, as he brought coffee over to his desk. He was big, well over six feet, graying.

I'd put a call in to Stella Moore at the *Courier*. She assured me there was no mistake. The man in the photo with Fel-

icia was Carl Toliver. My next move was to contact Joe. Although the murders didn't happen in his district, he's the friendliest ear I have on the force.

"What's the point of hiring someone to pretend to be yourself?"

Joe shrugged, sipped some of his coffee. "Confusion, keep us off balance."

"And if he didn't hire the guy?"

"Then we have someone who wanted to get rid of one or both of the victims, and decided to make use of Toliver's name to—"

"Confuse you and keep you off balance," I finished.

Joe nodded. "There's another thing. Whoever your phony Toliver is, he has to know a little about you. Whatever scheme he had in mind, he counted on you coming to the police once you learned of the murders. Some other P.I. might not've and we wouldn't have found out about the charade. Who knows you that well, Randy?"

"Hell, everybody and nobody." It was the only answer I could come up with. I'm a workaday P.I. The only notoriety I'd ever gotten was when I helped solve the murder of a skid row bum. Solve may be too strong a word. The killer was looking for someone to confess

to, and I'd been handy. The notoriety came from the bum's having been the former head of a conglomerate. The papers had made a big deal out of it, but that had been over a year ago.

I hung around Joe's office long enough for two detectives from the North Shore District, where the murders took place, to come down and interview me.

"Don't stick your nose in," Joe said, as I was about to leave.

"It's already in."

"Not any further."

"Okay, there's a lady who's got a lost cat she wants me to find."

Joe and my old man had gone through the academy together. They'd stayed close friends even when my old man was named in that payoff scandal. A single shot from his service revolver had been the method he'd used to get out from under.

Ever since then Joe has sort of filled in. Dishing out advice was part of it, whether I took it or not.

I caught up with the real Carl Toliver in his twenty-ninth floor condo. It took a business card, the mention of his wife's murder, and a ten minute wait before the butler led me to the study.

Toliver was standing by the window, a drink in his hand,

something clear with ice cubes. He was thinner than the guy who came to my office, roughly my height, cleanshaven, his hair a dusky blond parted high on the left side. There were no thick-framed glasses, no cigar. In just about every respect he was the opposite of the first Toliver. Even his voice had a smooth cultured quality to it. "What exactly is it you want, Mr. Sea?"

I explained my involvement, telling him that I'd gone to the police, but left out the details of Joe's and my conversation.

"Well, Mr. Sea, I really don't know who that could have been in your office. Myself, I haven't been out of town in over a month, and I gave up smoking two years ago. Didn't smoke cigars even then. And the police know that at the time of the murders I was hosting a luncheon honoring my projects staff on a Canadian venture."

I'd gotten Toliver's alibi from Joe. The luncheon was a buffet affair held in the building's cafeteria. Close to a hundred people had been milling about, and those the police questioned swore Toliver had been there all the time.

He raised the glass to his mouth, stopped. "Sorry, I'm forgetting my manners. Please help yourself at the bar."

He indicated the mirrored

bar with a wave of his hand. I begged off, and he continued with, "I'm used to handling all types of pressure, Mr. Sea, but Felicia's murder—" He paused, shook his head. "First they tell me she's dead, then that she'd been having an affair, now you show up." He went over to the bar and freshened his drink.

"I know the police asked you a lot of questions, Mr. Toliver, but if you could stand just a few of mine . . ."

"Are you investigating this? Has someone hired you?"

"Just trying to get a few things straight for myself."

"I don't know if I should be talking to you. I've never believed in private detectives interfering in police matters."

"I'm not interfering, Mr. Toliver. If I stumble onto anything, I'll let them know."

He looked at his glass for a moment, shrugged. "What did you want to know?"

"Have you any idea why someone would impersonate you?"

"I hadn't thought about it until now, but it must've been to implicate me. But I can't imagine who would want to kill Felicia."

"Maybe it was Harmond they were really after?"

"I can't be of any help to you there. I knew him in college, but I haven't had any contact

with him since."

"How well did you know him back then?"

"No secret there, it was the first thing I told the police. The three of us went to Carr together. I majored in business, Don in performing arts, and Felicia in commercial design."

"Were you a threesome then?"

"Not really. In fact, Felicia and Don went together for a while. But I had my father's business to take over once school was finished, and I guess she opted for a more assured future."

"Did you have any hint she was seeing someone?"

He shrugged again. "I never allowed myself to think about it. I've been too tied up in the business." His voice began to trail off somewhat. "I suppose I should've slowed down, spent more time with her."

I left him pouring himself another drink, and wondered how long it would take for him to get himself back together. Some people can snap right back after a tragedy, others never seem to make it. Right now, Toliver's resiliency looked doubtful.

It was a quarter to twelve; the same time last week Felicia was having lunch with the Women for a Cleaner Life. At this stage almost anything was worth a try. I made it to the Food Spa in less than half an hour.

It cost me twenty bucks, ten to find out the name of the chairperson and another ten for the waiter to take her a note scribbled on the back of my business card.

I waited in the lounge, in one of the front booths. They were very big on carrot juice. They had everything from carrot and honey to something called a carrot surprise. I stuck to O.J. on ice, and it came in a tall, frosted glass with a slice of orange, a tiny umbrella, and a price tag of four fifty.

"Mr. Sea?"

Gwen Rutherford was a woman in her fifties who was handling it very well. She was lithe, tanned, her hair a gentle fluff about her head.

She sat across the table from me, my business card still in her hand. "There's not much I can tell you about Felicia, Mr. Sea. I was shocked by her death, but I didn't know her personally."

"We have a woman who was married to one man, and found murdered in the arms of another. There has to be more to her than just that."

She nodded slightly. "Yes, you're right. But again, I only knew her through the organization. We're a small group, but we try to make ourselves heard. We're against smoking, the pollution of our water, our farm-

land, our air. We've even issued a letter against nuclear power plants."

"Was Mrs. Toliver a follower, a leader, or what?"

"She was one of our better members. In fact, she'd mentioned to me she might be moving to New York later this year, and had asked about starting a chapter there."

"Did she say when she was planning to go?"

"In the fall, I think. She only mentioned it once, but I got the impression she was making definite plans."

The rest of the interview didn't take long. Mrs. Rutherford had never met Carl Toliver, or seen Felicia with anyone who matched the Carl Toliver who'd hired me.

The office of Rudolph Keith, director of the Carr College theater group, had its walls covered with play bills, posters, and photos of its many productions. I recognized a number of faces, some big-name stars, others familiar to me from TV commercials.

I was trying to put a name to one of the faces when Keith breezed in.

"Police, reporters, and a private detective. This has been some day." He took a deep breath. His hair was a faded brown mop. He was a little

beefy, his jaws full, plump bags hung under his eyes. But he had a trained voice that boomed with strength.

"Now, Mr., er—" His glasses dangled from a gold chain around his neck. He raised them close to his face, the thick curved lenses magnifying my business card, which lay on his desk. "Mr. Sea. What kind of mud have you got to sling at poor Don?"

"What?"

"Come now. The police, the reporters—they all wanted to know if there were any other wives Don was helping to be unfaithful. Surely you're here for the same reason. Well, I'm sorry to disappoint, but I really think he and Felicia loved each other."

"What makes you say that?"

"I saw them a month ago at the reception the college gave to welcome Don back. He was here working on a new play that's opening on Broadway this fall. And he was giving us a hand with our production of his *Just Another Town*."

"They went together when they were students here, didn't they?"

One eyebrow raised. "I'm not the only one you've spoken to."

"Carl Toliver."

Keith nodded, his mouth pushed out somewhat. "There's your most likely suspect. A

truly possessive person. When they were students here, Felicia and Carl were sort of going together when she began helping out with set designing. She and Don hit it off very well and started dating. As part of Carl's campaign to win her back, he even joined our acting group. Did quite well, too. Might have been able to make a career out of it if he'd tried. But he had his father's business waiting for him when he graduated. That's him over there with the white beard. We were doing *Full Sails*, I believe."

Keith pointed at the photo I'd been studying when he came in. Tufts of white hair sprouted from beneath a sailor cap and flowed into a full beard and mustache. I'd known there was something about the face I recognized, but wasn't able to peg it until Keith told me who it was. Then it was easy to make out Toliver under all that hair—I could identify the eyes, the bridge of the nose.

"He finally got her back, with his own persistence and his father's money," Keith said. "But I guess true love won out after all."

"Not for long."

"What? Oh, yes, I see what you mean." Keith paused, shuffled some papers around. "Was there anything else?"

I thought it over. "You seem

pretty sure Toliver is responsible for the murders. Did you tell the reporters and the police this?"

"Well, I was a little more cautious with my choice of words for the press. Libel suits, you know."

"Did anyone happen to ask where you were at the time of the murders?"

"That they did," Keith said, showing me a broad smile.

"And?"

"I was here. Alone. Working out some restaging of Act Three."

I grabbed a sandwich at a burger barn, then made it back to my office. It was getting close to the first of the month, and the bills were adding up. I began separating them into piles of those I had to pay, those I could stall for a while, and those I didn't have to worry about for another month or so.

As I sat there making nice neat piles, I tried to get the murders limned out in my mind. Just what did I have? Toliver had the best—and so far the only known—motive for murder. But he had a decent enough alibi. And there was the other Carl Toliver to contend with.

I went around and around with it, but nothing was coming any clearer. And the bills I had to pay now were far outnum-

bering the other two piles.

I scooped the whole mess into my top drawer, got out pad and pencil, and hit the button on my phone answering machine. Roz, the young lady I'd shared the weekend with, had called to say she'd be free tomorrow. An insurance company I'd worked for a month or so ago needed some follow-up. And Stella Moore wanted me to call her.

I'd worked on a little something a few years back that had helped keep the *Courier's* gossip columnist out of everyone else's gossip column. She'd not only paid me well, but we'd become good friends.

"Randy, are you dipping into the Harmond-Toliver murders?"

"A little."

"I thought you might be. Tell me, anyone wave the name of Rudolph Keith around?"

"Why should they?"

"I had to check in the back files to get the facts straight. Six years ago, after Harmond's first play hit it big on Broadway, Keith sued him. He claimed he and Harmond collaborated on the play, *Just Another Town*, when Harmond was a student at Carr College."

"What happened?"

"The suit was thrown out. It was judged that whatever aid Keith gave Harmond was in a student/teacher relationship and

didn't constitute collaboration."

"I spoke to Keith today, and he didn't mention anything about it."

"He was very vocal at the time. Called Harmond every kind of crook in the dictionary."

"Yet Keith welcomed him back with open arms, and the school is putting on a production of the disputed play."

"Maybe Keith got over it," she said.

"Maybe he didn't. Look, have you told the police about this yet?"

"No. I was waiting to get your reaction first."

"Thanks for the advance notice, but they ought to be told."

"I'll get on it right away. Oh, and Randy, do a friend a favor. If you do help out on cracking this thing, I get all the inside gossip. Right?"

"For sure, Stella. Take care."

I don't know how long I sat there watching the phone and thinking over what Stella had said about Keith. When I finally realized I was just letting my mind get all tangled again, I knew it was time for a change of scenery.

Mick's had a good-sized crowd, and the volume of their chatter was just enough to drown out the piped-in music. I found a spot at the bar, had Harry pour me a double of the first thing he got his hand on. It turned

out to be gin, which I don't particularly like, but I made do.

I was almost finished with the gin and in a conversation with one of the insurance brokers in the building when Joe came in.

"Figured you might be here."

"Home sweet home," I said.

He got a beer from Harry, and I followed him to the back corner by the phone. We had to stand, but it was the most private spot in the joint just then.

"What've you got so far, Randy?"

"I'm supposed to keep my nose out, remember?"

Joe's smile ripped across his broad face. "I guess that's why you went to see Toliver?"

"That was just curiosity. I had to make sure he wasn't the one who came to my office. How did you find out, you got him watched?"

Joe shook his head. "No, Toliver reported it himself. Said you were bothering him."

"Questioning."

"Whatever. He called the North Shore District, and they called me."

"So, your official warning to stay clear is more official now?"

Joe shrugged. "Kind of depends on where you are with this thing. If you're no farther than where you were this morning, then best move on to something else. But if you've got

something working, then maybe you ought to keep at it. Which is it?"

My drink was down to melted ice. I thought about getting something more agreeable to my palate; like an aged bourbon, but changed my mind. Instead, I told Joe what I'd been doing since this morning, who was seen, what was said, and my feelings on same, including Stella's phone call.

"Keith, huh? I'm glad the North Shore boys got this one. I lose enough sleep as it is." He paused long enough for a swallow of beer. "You might as well know this. We've got a cab driver who roundtripped a fare from Toliver's office building to Harmond's townhouse, and back. The cab driver logged the starting time at twelve thirty-five, which gets the fare there at our best guess of the murder time. The kicker is the fare fits your Toliver to the letter, right down to the same suit."

"You sure?"

"I checked it myself. The cabbie remembers the guy from his foul cigar. He was rude, and he didn't leave a tip."

"He wanted to be remembered."

Joe nodded his agreement.

"I don't suppose the cabbie heard anything like gun shots?"

"No. But he said the fare went around the back of the

townhouse first, and came out through the front."

"Somebody's trying awful hard to lay this on Toliver's doorstep."

"So, who else have we got?"

"Keith?" I said. It was the only other name I could think of.

- Joe drained the last of his beer, belched, and said, "Prove it."

I stayed at Mick's after Joe left, making my way to the bar for some bourbon this time.

Prove it.

It was some challenge Joe had offered me. Prove Keith was behind the murders. If I could get my hands on the first Carl Toliver it would be easy. He was the key to this thing. He would be the one who would cop a plea and turn in whoever hired him. But I'd have to find him first. What if he was dead himself by now, or out of the state or both? Where would that leave me? Was there any way I could get to Keith without using the other Toliver?

The questions kept me going most of the night, a good part of it at Mick's. But all I had the next morning was a giant headache.

My office faces west out into the city. I get a chunk of the older buildings that make up the downtown area, and a fair view of the river as it makes its

last bend before joining the lake.

I stood by the window watching the bromo bubble in my glass. Some of the buildings across from me picked up the golden glare of the sun and spread it over the flat surface of their windowpanes. The glare reflected onto my glass, and I watched the golden glow cling to the contoured surface, curving as it curved, the bromo bubbling merrily.

It got me thinking, about Toliver, Keith. About the difference between Keith's glasses and the ones the Toliver in my office wore. I called Joe.

Joe in turn called the two cops from the North Shore District I'd spoken to yesterday.

We caught up with Toliver in his office. I guess he figured one day of mourning was enough.

"Sorry, I can't spare you much time" was the way he greeted us. "I've got a lot of things to do today, including finalizing my wife's funeral arrangements."

"This is still a murder investigation, Mr. Toliver," Waverly said. He was a hulk whose hefty shoulders made his head seem too small for his body. "We're looking into a theory of Mr. Sea's, and we can do it here or back at the precinct."

"If you're going to be that in-

sistent," Toliver said, sitting at his desk. "Get on with it."

Waverly gave me the nod, and I took over. "The thing that screwed us up was the guy who came to my office claiming to be you. He made no attempt to copy any of your mannerisms, or effect a resemblance. Yet he made sure that the cab driver who picked him up from the murder scene and I could both describe him. It looked like a bad job of trying to involve you in the murders. Which made the other Toliver the prime suspect. And served to make you the least likely."

A smile almost shaped the corners of Toliver's mouth. "Is that what this is about? I'm the least likely suspect?"

"Were," I corrected him. "You planned for the police to be looking for the other Toliver and never give you another thought. When, in fact, there was only one Carl Toliver all along, aided with some makeup and a credible acting ability."

It was something I should've picked up on from the start. The glasses Toliver was wearing at my office were flat windowpanes, stage props. There was no curve to them like all real glasses have. I'd seen them, but they hadn't registered.

I realized it when I was watching the bromo bubble, in the contrast between my win-

dowpane and the glass I was holding. The glasses, the cigar, the three piece suit, they were all a part of the costume that turned the real Carl Toliver into the phony one.

"You threw the luncheon at your office to give yourself an alibi. A hundred people milling about, there was no real way to keep track of you. You slipped out, got into your getup, and did the number on your wife and Harmond. You made a show for the cab driver so he'd remember the phony Toliver. Rejoining the luncheon when you got back, without anyone's noticing you'd gone."

Toliver laughed out loud. "I'm supposed to confess now and plead for mercy?"

"It would save us a lot of trouble."

"Too bad. I didn't do it, and you can't prove I did."

"I think we can give it a good try," I said. "I'm willing to swear you were the same man who hired me, phony mustache and all. And I'm sure with a little art work on a recent photo, the cab driver won't have any problem identifying you either."

"I thought the police were handling the investigation?"

"We are," Waverly said.

"Well?" Toliver fixed a hard stare on him.

"I think," Waverly started, "Mr. Sea has raised enough

questions that we should continue this at the precinct."

"I'll want my lawyer present."

It was late afternoon when Joe tracked me down, which didn't take much seeing as how I was in a back booth at Mick's, nursing a beer and working on a bowl of pretzels.

"He confessed to the whole thing," Joe said, sliding in across from me.

"With his lawyer there?"

Joe shrugged. "We got search warrants, found the murder weapon and the getup locked in his office closet. Beard, suit, padding, the whole shot. His lawyer told him to be quiet, but once he got started he just kept going."

"Proud of his handiwork?"

"A lot of them are like that. He'd been carrying your name around for a year, ever since the

skid row thing. Thought if he ever needed a P.I. he'd call you. He knew about his wife and Harmond from the start, couldn't stand the idea of her leaving him. He worked out his plan and pulled you in, expecting you to tell your story to the police and drop out."

Joe popped a pretzel in his mouth, used my beer to wash it down.

"With all the planning, you'd think he'd dump the gun first thing."

Joe nodded. "He hung onto everything in case the deal started going sour. Then he planned to lay the whole pile on Keith. But we acted too quickly for him. Thanks to you."

"Yeah, if nothing else, I'm fast," I said, reaching for my beer, but Joe got to it first.

He polished it off, set the empty mug down smiling, and said, "sometimes."

MYSTERY CLASSIC

The Opal Of Carmalovitch

by Max Pemberton

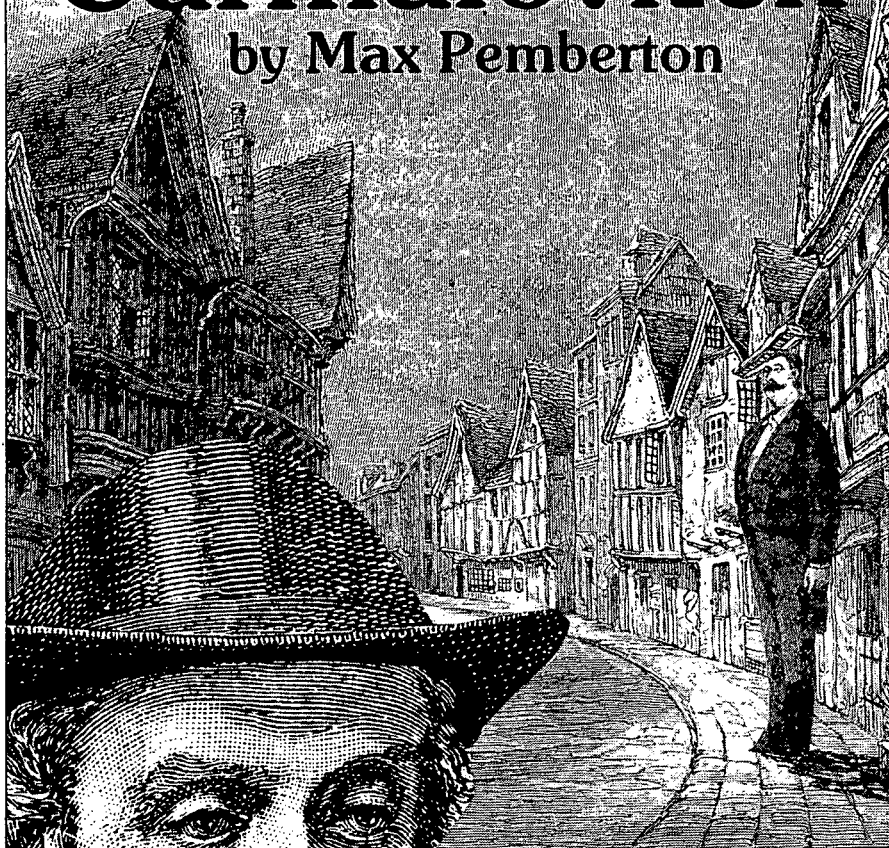


Illustration by Marc Yankus

140

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Dark was falling from a dull and humid sky, and the lamps were beginning to struggle for brightness in Piccadilly, when the opal of Carmalovitch was first put into my hand. The day had been a sorry one for business: no light, no sun, no stay of the downpour of penetrating mist which had been swept through the city by the driving south wind from the late dawn to the mock of sunset. I had sat in my private office for six long hours, and had not seen a customer. The umbrella-bearing throng which trod the street before my window hurried quickly through the mud and the slush, as people who had no leisure even to gaze upon precious stones they could not buy. I was going home, in fact, as the one sensible proceeding on such an afternoon, and had my hand upon the great safe to shut it, when the mirror above my desk showed me the reflection of a curious looking man who had entered the outer shop; and stood already at the counter.

At the first glance I judged that this man was no ordinary customer. His dress was altogether singular. He had a black coat covering him from his neck to his heels—a coat half smothered in astrakhan, and one which could have been made by no English tailor. But his hands were ungloved, and he wore a low hat, which might have been the hat of an office boy. I could see from the little window of my private room, which gives my eye command of the shop, that he had come on foot, and for lack of any umbrella was pitifully wet. Yet there was fine bearing about him, and he was clearly a man given to command, for my assistant mounted to my room with his name at the first bidding.

"Does he say what he wants?" I asked, reading the large card upon which were the words—

STENILOFF CARMALOVITCH

but the man replied,—

"Only that he must see you immediately. I don't like the look of him at all."

"Is Abel in the shop?"

"He's at the door."

"Very well; let him come to the foot of my stairs, and if I ring as usual, both of you come up."

In this profession of jewel-selling—for every calling is a profession nowadays—we are so constantly cheek by jowl with swindlers

that the coming of one more or less is of little moment in a day's work. At my own place of business the material and personal precautions are so organized that the cleverest scoundrel living would be troubled to get free of the shop with sixpenny-worth of booty on him: I have two armed men ready at the ring of my bell—Abel is one of them—and a private wire to the nearest police station. From an alcove well hidden on the right hand of the lower room, a man watches by day the large cases where the smaller gems are shown, and by night a couple of special guards have charge of the safe and the premises. I touch a bell twice in my room, and my own detective follows any visitor who gives birth in my mind to the slightest doubt. I ring three times, and any obvious impostor is held prisoner until the police come. These things are done by most jewellers in the West End; there is nothing in them either unusual or fearful. There are so many professed swindlers—so many would-be snappers up of unconsidered and considerable trifles—that precautions such as I have named are the least that common sense and common prudence will allow me to take. And they have saved me from loss, as they have saved others again and again.

I had scarce given my instructions to Michel, my assistant—a rare reader of intention, and a fine judge of faces—when the shabby-genteel man entered. Michel placed a chair for him on the opposite side of my desk, and then left the room. There was no more greeting between the newcomer and myself than a mutual nodding of heads; and he on his part fell at once upon his business. He took a large paper parcel from the inside pocket of his coat and began to unpack it; but there was so much paper, both brown and tissue, that I had some moments of leisure in which to examine him more closely before we got to talk. I set him down in my mind as a man hovering on the boundary line of the middle age, a man with infinite distinction marked in a somewhat worn face, and with some of the oldest clothes under the shielding long coat that I have ever looked upon. These I saw when he unbuttoned the enveloping cape to get at his parcel in the inner pocket; and while he undid it, I could observe that his fingers were thin as the talons of a bird, and that he trembled all over with the mere effort of unloosing the string.

The operation lasted some minutes. He spoke no word during that time, but when he had reduced the coil of brown paper to a tiny square of wash-leather, I asked him,—

"Have you something to show me?"

He looked up at me with a pair of intensely, ridiculously blue eyes, and shrugged his shoulders.

"Should I undo all these papers if I had not?" he responded; and I saw at once that he was a man who, from a verbal point of view, stood objectionably upon the defensive.

"What sort of a stone is it?" I went on in a somewhat uninterested tone of voice; "not a ruby, I hope. I have just bought a parcel of rubies."

By way of answer he opened the little wash-leather bag, and taking up my jewel tongs, which lay at his hand, he held up an opal of such prodigious size and quality, that I restrained myself with difficulty from crying out at the sight of it. It was a Cerwenitzza stone, I saw at a glance, almost a perfect circle in shape, and at least four inches in diameter. There was a touch of the oxide in its color which gave it the faintest suspicion of black in the shade of its lights; but for wealth of hue and dazzling richness in its general quality, it surpassed any stone I have known, even that in the imperial cabinet at Vienna. So brilliant was it, so fascinating in the ever-changing play of its amazing variegations, so perfect in every characteristic of the finest Hungarian gems, that for some moments I let the man hold it out to me, and said no word. There was running through my mind the question which must have arisen under such circumstances: Where had he got it from? He had stolen it, I concluded at the first thought; and again, at the second. How else could a man who wore rags under an astrakhan coat have come to the possession of a gem upon which the most commercial instinct would have hesitated to set a price?

I had fully determined that I was face to face with a swindler, when his exclamation reminded me that he expected me to speak.

"Well," he said, "are you frightened to look at it?"

He had been holding out the tongs, in which he gripped the stone lightly, for some seconds, and I had not yet ventured to touch them, sitting, I do not doubt, with surprise written all over my face. But when he spoke, I took the opal from him, and turned my strong glass upon it.

"You seem to have brought me a fine thing," I said as carelessly as I could. "Is it a stone with a history?"

"It has no history—at least, none that I should care to write."

"And yet," I continued, "there cannot be three larger opals in

Europe; do you know the stone at Vienna?"

"Perfectly; but it has not the black of this, and is coarser. This is an older stone, so far as the birth of its discovery goes, by a hundred years."

I thought that he was glib with his tale for a man who had such a poor one; and certainly he looked me in the face with amazing readiness. He had not the eyes of a rogue, and his manner was not that of one criminally restless.

"If you will allow me," I said, when I had looked at the stone for a few moments, "I will examine this under the brighter light there; perhaps you would like to amuse yourself with this parcel of rubies."

This was a favorite little trick of mine. I had two or three parcels of stones to show to any man who came to me laboring under a sorry and palpably poor story; and one of these I then took from my desk and spread upon the table under the eyes of the Russian. The stones were all imitation, and worth no more than sixpence apiece. If he were a judge, he would discover the cheat at the first sight of them; if he were a swindler, he would endeavor to steal them. In either case the test was useful. And I took care to turn my back upon him while I examined the opal, to give him every opportunity of filling his pockets should he choose.

When I had the jewel under the powerful light of an unshaded incandescent lamp I could see that it merited all the appreciation I had bestowed upon it at first sight. It was flawless, wanting the demerit of a single mark which could be pointed to in depreciation of its price. For play of color and radiating generosity of hues, I have already said that no man has seen its equal. I put it in the scales, called Michel to establish my own opinions, tried it by every test that can be applied to a gem so fragile and so readily harmed, and came to the only conclusion possible—that it was a stone which would make a sensation in any market; and call bids from all the courts in Europe. It remained for me to learn the history of it, and with that I went back to my desk and resumed the conversation, first glancing at the sham parcel of rubies, to find that the man had not even looked at them.

"It is a remarkable opal," I said; "the finest ever put before me. You have come here to sell it, I presume?"

"Exactly. I want five thousand pounds for it."

"And if I make you a bid you are prepared to furnish me with

the history both of it and of yourself?"

He shrugged his shoulders contemptuously. "If you think that I have stolen it we had better close the discussion at once. I am not prepared to tell my history to every tradesman I deal with."

"In that case," said I, "you have wasted your time. I buy no jewels that I do not know all about."

His superciliousness was almost impertinent. It would have been quite so if it had not been dominated by an absurd and almost grotesque pride, which accounted for his temper. I was sure then that he was either an honest man or the best actor I had ever seen.

"Think the matter over," I added in a less indifferent tone; "I am certain that you will then acquit me of unreasonableness. Call here again in a day or two, and we will have a chat about it."

This softer speech availed me as little as the other. He made no sort of answer to it, but packing his opal carefully again, he rose abruptly and left the shop. As he went I touched my bell twice, and Abel followed him quietly down Piccadilly, while I sent a line to Scotland Yard informing the commissioners of the presence of such a man as the Russian in London, and of the gargantuan jewel which he carried. Then I went home through the fog and the humid night; but my way was lighted by a memory of the magnificent gem I had seen, and the hunger for the opal was already upon me.

The inquiry at Scotland Yard proved quite futile. The police telegraphed to Paris, to Berlin, to St. Petersburg, to New York, but got no tidings either of a robbery or of the man whom mere circumstances pointed at as a pretender. This seemed to me the more amazing since I could not conceive that a stone such as this was should not have made a sensation in some place. Jewels above all material things do not hide their light under bushels. Let there be a great find at Kimberley or in the Burmese mines; let a fine emerald or a perfect turquoise be brought to Europe and every dealer in the country knows its weight, its color, and its value before three days have passed. If this man, who hugged this small fortune to him, and without it was a beggar, had been a worker at Cerwenitza, he would have told me the fact plainly. But he spoke of the opal being older even than the famous and commonly cited specimen at Vienna. How came it that he alone had the history of such an ancient gem? There was only one answer to such a question—the history of his possession of it, at any rate, would not bear inquiry.

Such perplexity was not removed by Abel's account of his journey after Carmalovitch. He had followed the man from Piccadilly to Oxford Circus; thence, after a long wait in Regent's Park, where the Russian sat for at least an hour on a seat near the Botanical Gardens entrance, to a small house in Boscobel Place. This was evidently a lodging house, offering that fare of shabbiness and dirt which must perforce be attractive to the needy. There was a light burning at the window of the pretentiously poor drawingroom when the man arrived, and a girl, apparently not more than twenty-five years of age, came down into the hall to greet him, the pair afterwards showing at the window for a moment before the blinds were drawn. An inquiry by my man for apartments in the house elicited only a shrill cackle and a negative from the shuffling hag who answered the knock. A tour of the little shops in the neighborhood provided the further clue "that they paid for nothing." This suburban estimation of personal worth was a confirmation of my conclusion drawn from the rags beneath the astrakhan coat. The Russian was a poor man; except for the possession of the jewel he was near to being a beggar. And yet he had not sought to borrow money of me, and he had put the price of five thousand pounds upon his property.

All these things did not leave my mind for the next week. I was in daily communication with Scotland Yard, but absolutely to no purpose. Their sharpest men handled the case, and confessed that they could make nothing of it. We had the house in Boscobel Place watched, but so far as we could learn, Carmalovitch, as he called himself, never left it. Meanwhile, I began to think that I had betrayed exceedingly poor judgment in raising the question at all. As the days went by I suffered that stone hunger which a student of opals alone can know. I began to believe that I had lost by my folly one of the greatest possessions that could come to a man in my business. I knew that it would be an act of childishness to go to the house and re-open the negotiations, for I could not bid for that which the first telegram from the Continent might prove to be feloniously gotten, and the embarkation of such a sum as was asked was a matter not for the spur of the moment, but for the closest deliberation, to say nothing of financial preparation. Yet I would have given fifty pounds if the owner of it had walked into my office again; and I never heard a footstep in the outer shop during the week following his visit but I looked up in the hope of

seeing him.

A fortnight passed, and I thought that I had got to the beginning and the end of the opal mystery, when one morning, the moment after I had entered my office, Michel told me that a lady wished to see me. I had scarce time to tell him that I could see no one for an hour when the visitor pushed past him into the den, and sat herself down in the chair before my writing desk. As in all business, we appreciate, and listen to, impertinence in the jewel trade; and when I observed the magnificent impudence of the young lady, I asked Michel to leave us, and waited for her to speak. She was a delicate looking woman—an Italian, I thought, from the dark hue of her skin and the lustrous beauty of her eyes—but she was exceedingly shabbily dressed, and her hands were ungloved. She was not a woman you would have marked in the stalls of a theater as the fit subject for an advertising photographer; but there was great sweetness in her face, and those signs of bodily weakness and want of strength which so often enhance a woman's beauty. When she spoke, although she had little English, her voice was well modulated and remarkably pleasing.

"You are Monsieur Bernard Sutton?" she asked, putting one hand upon my table, and the other between the buttons of her bodice.

I bowed in answer to her.

"You have met my husband—I am Madame Carmalovitch—he was here, it is fifteen days, to sell you an opal. I have brought it again to you now, for I am sure you wish to buy it."

"You will pardon me," I said, "but I am waiting for the history of the jewel which your husband promised me. I rather expected that he would have sent it."

"I know! oh, I know so well; and I have asked him many times," she answered; "but you can believe me, he will tell of his past to no one, not even to me. But he is honest and true; there is not such a man in all your city—and he has suffered. You may buy this beautiful thing now, and you will never regret it. I tell you so from all my heart."

"But surely, madame," said I, "you must see that I cannot pay such a price as your husband is asking for his property if he will not even tell me who he is, or where he comes from."

"Yes, that is it—not even to me has he spoken of these things. I was married to him six years now at Naples, and he has always

had the opal which he offers to you. We were rich then, but we have known suffering, and this alone is left to us. You will buy it of my husband, for you in all this London are the man to buy it. It will give you fame and money; it must give you both, for we ask but four thousand pounds for it."

I started at this. Here was a drop of a thousand pounds upon the price asked but fifteen days ago. What did it mean? I took up the gem, which the woman had placed upon the table, and saw in a moment. The stone was dimming. It had lost color since I had seen it; it had lost, too, I judged, at least one-third of its value. I had heard the old women's tales of the capricious changefulness of this remarkable gem, but it was the first time that I had ever witnessed for myself such an unmistakable depreciation. The woman read the surprise in my eyes, and answered my thoughts, herself thoughtful, and her dark eyes touched with tears.

"You see what I see," she said. "The jewel that you have in your hand is the index to my husband's life. He has told me so often. When he is well, it is well; when hope has come to him, the lights which shine there are as the light of his hope. When he is ill, the opal fades; when he dies, it will die, too. That is what I believe and he believes; it is what his father told him when he gave him the treasure, nearly all that was left of a great fortune."

This tale astounded me; it betrayed absurd superstition, but it was the first ray of coherent explanation which had been thrown upon the case. I took up the thread with avidity and pursued it.

"Your husband's father was a rich man?" I asked. "Is he dead?"

She looked up with a start, then dropped her eyes quickly, and mumbled something. Her hesitation was so marked that I put her whole story from me as a clever fabrication, and returned again to the theory of robbery.

"Madame," I said, "unless your husband can add to that which you tell me, I shall be unable to purchase your jewel."

"Oh, for the love of God don't say that!" she cried; "we are so poor, we have hardly eaten for days! Come and see Monsieur Carmalovitch and he shall tell you all; I implore you, and you will never regret this kindness! My husband is a good friend; he will reward your friendship. You will not refuse me this?"

It is hard to deny a pretty woman; it is harder still when she pleads with tears in her voice. I told her that I would go and see her husband on the following evening at nine o'clock, and coun-

selling her to persuade him in the between time to be frank with me, since frankness alone could avail him. She accepted my advice with gratitude, and left as she had come, her pretty face made handsomer by its look of gloom and pensiveness. Then I fell to thinking upon the wisdom, or want of wisdom, in the promise I had given. Stories of men drugged, or robbed, or murdered by jewel thieves crowded upon my mind, but, always with the recollection that I should carry nothing to Boscobel Place. A man who had no more upon him than a well-worn suit of clothes and a Swiss lever watch in a silver case, such as I carry invariably, would scarce be quarry for the most venturesome shop-hawk that the history of knavery has made known to us. I could risk nothing by going to the house, I was sure; but I might get the opal, and for that I longed still with a fever for possession which could only be accounted for by the beauty of the gem.

Being come to this determination, I left my own house in a hansom cab on the following evening at half past eight o'clock, taking Abel with me, more after my usual custom than from any prophetic alarm. I had money upon me sufficient only for the payment of the cab; and I took the extreme precaution of putting aside the diamond ring that I had been wearing during the day. As I live in Bayswater, it was but a short drive across Paddington Green and down the Marylebone Road to Boscobel Place; and when we reached the house we found it lighted up on the drawingroom floor as Abel had seen it at his first going there. But the hall was quite in darkness, and I had to ring twice before the shrill-voiced dame I had heard of answered to my knock. She carried a frousy candle in her hand; and was so uncanny looking that I motioned to Abel to keep a watch from the outside upon the house before I went upstairs to that which was a typical lodging-house room. There was a "tapestry" sofa against one wall; half a dozen chairs in evident decline stood in hilarious attitudes; some seaweed, protected for no obvious reason by shades of glass, decorated the mantelpiece; and a sampler displayed the obviously aggravating advice to a tenant of such a place, "Waste not, want not." But the rickety writing table was strewn with papers, and there was half a cigar lying upon the edge of it, and a cup of coffee there had grown cold in the dish.

The aspect of the place amazed me. I began to regret that I had set out upon any such enterprise, but had no time to draw back before the Russian entered. He wore an out-at-elbow velvet coat,

and the rest of his dress was shabby enough to suit his surroundings. I noticed, however, that he offered me a seat with a gesture that was superb, and that his manner was less agitated than it had been at our first meeting.

"I am glad to see you," he said. "You have come to buy my opal?"

"Under certain conditions, yes."

"That is very good of you; but I am offering you a great bargain. My price for the stone now is three thousand pounds, one thousand less than my wife offered it at yesterday."

"It has lost more of its color, then?"

"Decidedly; or I should not have lowered my claim—but see for yourself."

He took the stone from the wash-leather bag, and laid it upon the writing table. I started with amazement and sorrow at the sight of it. The glorious lights I had admired not twenty days ago were half gone; a dull, salty-red tinge was creeping over the superb green and the scintillating black which had made me covet the jewel with such longing. Yet it remained, even in its comparative poverty, the most remarkable gem I have ever put hand upon.

"The stone is certainly going off," I said in answer to him. "What guarantee have I that it will not be worthless in a month's time?"

"You have my word. It is a tradition of our family that he who owns that heirloom when it begins to fade must sell it or die—and sell it at its worth. If I continue to possess it, the tradition must prove itself, for I shall die of sheer starvation."

"And if another has it?"

"It will regain its lights, I have no doubt of it, for it has gone like this before when a death has happened amongst us. If you are content to take my word, I will return to you in six months' time and make good any loss you have suffered by it. But I should want some money now, tonight, before an hour—could you let me have it?"

"If I bought your stone, you could have the money for it; my man, who is outside, would fetch my checkbook."

At the word "man," he went to the window, and saw Abel standing beneath the gaslamp. He looked fixedly at the fellow for a moment, and then drew down the blinds in a deliberate way which I did not like at all.

"That servant of yours has been set to watch this house for ten days," he said. "Was that by your order?"

I was so completely taken aback by his discovery that I sat for a moment dumbfounded, and gave him no answer. He, however, seemed trembling with passion.

"Was it by your orders?" he asked again, standing over me and almost hissing out his words.

"It was," I answered after a pause; "but, you see, circumstances were suspicious."

"Suspicious! Then you *did* believe me to be a rogue. I have shot men for less."

I attempted to explain, but he would not hear me. He had lost command of himself, stalking up and down the room with great strides until the temper tautened his veins, and his lean hands seemed nothing but wire and bones. At last, he took a revolver from the drawer in his table, and deliberately put cartridges into it. I stood up at the sight of it and made a step towards the window; but he pointed the pistol straight at me, crying,—

"Sit down, if you wish to live another minute—and say, do you still believe me to be a swindler?"

The situation was so dangerous, for the man was obviously but half sane, that I do not know what I said in answer to him; yet he pursued my words fiercely, scarce hearing my reply before he continued:

"You have had my house watched, and, as I know now, you have branded my name before the police as that of a criminal; you shall make atonement here on the spot by buying that opal, or you do not leave the room alive!"

It was a desperate trial, and I sat for some minutes as a man on the borderland of death. Had I been sensible then and fenced with him in his words, I should now possess that opal; but I let out the whole of my thoughts—and the jewel went with them.

"I cannot buy your stone," I said, "until I have your history and your father's—" But I said no more, for at the mention of his father he cried out like a wounded beast, and fired the revolver straight at my head. The shot skinned my forehead and the powder behind it blackened my face; but I had no other injury, and I sprang upon him.

For some moments the struggle was appalling. I had him gripped about the waist with my left arm, my right clutching the hand wherein he held the pistol. He, in turn, put his left hand upon my throat and threw his right leg round mine with a sinewy strength

that amazed me. Thus we were, rocking like two trees blown in a gale, now swaying towards the window, now to the door, now crashing against the table, or hurling the papers and the ink and the ornaments in a confused heap, as, fighting the ground foot by foot, we battled for the mastery. But I could not cry out, for his grip about my neck was the grip of a maniac; and as it tightened and tightened, the light grew dim before my eyes and I felt that I was choking. This he knew, and with overpowering fury pressed his fingers upon my throat until he cut me with his nails as with knives. Then, at last, I reeled from the agony of it; and we fell with tremendous force under the window, he uppermost.

Of that lifelong minute that followed, I remember but little. I know only that he knelt upon my chest, still gripping my throat with his left hand, and began to reach out for his revolver, which had dropped beneath the table in our struggle. I had just seen him reach it with his fingertips, and so draw it inch by inch towards him, when a fearful scream rang out in the room, and his hand was stayed. The scream was from the woman who had come to Piccadilly the day before, and it was followed by a terrible paroxysm of weeping, and then by a heavy fall, as the terrified girl fainted. He let me go at this, and stood straight up; but at the first step towards his wife he put his foot upon the great opal, which we had thrown to the ground in our encounter, and he crushed it into a thousand fragments.

When he saw what he had done, one cry, and one alone, escaped from him; but before I could raise a hand to stay him, he had turned the pistol to his head, and had blown his brains out.

The story of the opal of Carmalovitch is almost told. A long inquiry after the man's death added these facts to the few I had already gleaned. He was the son of a banker in Budapest, a noble Russian, who had emigrated to Hungary and taken his wealth with him to embark it in his business. He himself had been educated partly in England, partly in France; but at the moment when he should have entered the great firm in Budapest, there came the Argentine crash, and his father was one of those who succumbed. But he did more than succumb; he helped himself to the money of his partners and, being discovered, was sentenced as a common felon, and is at this moment in a Hungarian prison.

Steniloff, the son, was left to clear up the estate, and got from

it, when all was settled, a few thousand pounds, by the generosity of his father's partners: Beyond these he had the opal, which the family had possessed for three hundred years, buying it originally in Vienna. This possession, however, had, for the sake of some absurd tradition, always been kept a profound secret, and when the great crash came, the man whose death I had witnessed took it as his fortune. For some years he had lived freely, at Rome, at Nice, at Naples, where he married; but his money being almost spent, he brought his wife to England, and there attempted to sell the jewel. As he would tell nothing of his history, lest his father's name should suffer, he found no buyer, and dragged on from month to month, going deeper in the byways of poverty until he came to me. The rest I have told you.

Of the opal which I saw so woefully crushed in the lodging house in Boscobel Place, but one large fragment remained. I have had that set in a ring, and have sold it today for fifty pounds. The money will go to Madame Carmalovitch, who has returned to her parents in Naples. She has suffered much.

SOLUTION TO THE DECEMBER "UNSOLVED":

Abrams was guilty. The truth-tellers were Abrams, Cummings, Edwards, and Gunther. The men who lied were Babbo, Dillon, Flam, and Higgins.

THE STORY THAT WON



Cartier-Bresson/Magnum

The September Mysterious Photograph contest (photo above) was won by Wendy Haskett of Cardiff, California. Honorable mentions go to Robert Gray of Rutland, Vermont; Pauline Presley of Carbondale, Illinois; Anne Rapp of Greeneville, Tennessee; Arthur Moore of Westlake-Village, California; B. Newton of Saline, Michigan; Donna Musgrave of Lake Jackson, Texas; Jim Stover of Chattanooga, Tennessee; Kate Barber of Middlebury, Vermont; John Dix of Branford, Connecticut; Gerri Lynsey of Clinton, Maryland; and David M. Troop of Reading, Pennsylvania.

NOT EVEN SKIN DEEP by Wendy Haskett

"You say that you saw the body down there, Mr. Williams?" Chief Inspector Baldwin said. He peered over the concrete railway abutment into the gloomy shadows below. There was a strong smell of tar. In spite of the upturned collar of his mackintosh, he could feel rain drizzling down his neck. "And you recognized him as . . ." His words were drowned by the 3:15 from Marylebone to Garrad's Cross. Clickety-clack. Clickety-clack. ". . . as Len Ogglethorpe?" he finished after the train had passed.

He felt excitement stirring. By God, if it *was* Ogglethorpe . . . He'd been on the trail of that sociopathic murderer for nearly a year! The "Smiling Killer." The fellow was incredibly cunning. A master of disguise. •

A discreet cough made him turn his head. Williams was smiling. "Lonely spot, isn't it, inspector?" he said softly. Still smiling, he peeled off his false eyebrows, his mustache, the V-shaped scar on his chin. A butcher's knife, wickedly large, glinted in his other hand. "A pity to kill a good adversary, but you've been getting too close, inspector," Ogglethorpe said pleasantly, and lunged.

The inspector dodged to the side, his reflexes quick as a twenty-year-old's. The Smiling Killer's shoes skidded on the rain-slick bridge. He lurched, flailed, and toppled forwards, screaming, as the 3:20 to Wickham roared around the bend.

The inspector leaned shakily on the abutment until the train had gone. "Prophetic sort of chap," he murmured, peering down into the gloomy shadows below.

alfred HITCHCOCK'S mystery magazine

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING ORDER FORM

Send to ALFRED HITCHCOCK MAGAZINE
Classified Advertising Department/Suite 1401
380 Lexington Avenue, Room 1507, N.Y. 10017

(PLEASE PRINT OR TYPE)

YOUR NAME _____

FIRM (NAME IN AD) _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

STATE _____

ZIP _____

PHONE: _____

DATE: _____

YOUR SIGNATURE _____

20 WORD MINIMUM

Only \$25.00 for 20 Words or Less
\$1.25 each additional word

Capitalized words add—40¢ per word
**SAVE 15% WITH 3 CONSECUTIVE MONTHS
SAME COPY ORDER**

DEADLINE: Copy and payment must be in by the
5th day of the third preceding month for issue in
which ad is to appear.

Words at \$1.25 each \$ _____

Capitalized word at 40¢ each \$ _____

Total amount for 1 ad \$ _____

15% Savings with 3 Consecutive Months Discount

(a) Multiply one ad total \$ _____ x 3 = \$ _____

(b) Multiply total amount on above line by $\frac{1}{3}$ x .85

(c) Total amount for 3 ads \$ _____

(Example: One 20 word ad \$25.00 x 3
months = \$75.00 x .85 = \$63.75)

\$ _____ is enclosed for _____ insertion(s) in the _____ issue(s) _____ Heading _____

(FOR ADDITIONAL WORDS ATTACH SEPARATE SHEET)

(1) \$25.00	(2) \$25.00	(3) \$25.00	(4) \$25.00	(5) \$25.00
(6) \$25.00	(7) \$25.00	(8) \$25.00	(9) \$25.00	(10) \$25.00
(11) \$25.00	(12) \$25.00	(13) \$25.00	(14) \$25.00	(15) \$25.00
(16) \$25.00	(17) \$25.00	(18) \$25.00	(19) \$25.00	(20) \$25.00
(21) \$26.25	(22) \$27.50	(23) \$28.75	(24) \$30.00	(25) \$31.25
(26) \$32.50	(27) \$33.75	(28) \$35.00	(29) \$36.25	(30) \$37.50

HOW TO COUNT WORDS: Name and address must be included in counting the number of Words in your ad. Each initial or number counts as 1 word: Mark Holly, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017; 7 WORDS. Zip codes are not counted. Phone #: 2 Words. Symbols used as keys are charged for: City or State count as 1 word each; Garden City, New York; 2 words. Abbreviations such as C.O.D., F.O.B., P.O., U.S.A., 7x10, 35mm count as 1 word. (P.O. Box 145 count as 3 words) Webster's International Unabridged Dictionary will be used as our authority for spelling, compound words, hyphens, abbreviations, etc. **Please make checks payable to ALFRED HITCHCOCK MAGAZINE.**

CLASSIFIED MARKET

AH JAN./84.

ALFRED HITCHCOCK — published 13 times a year. CLASSIFIED AD rate is \$2.35 per word — payable in advance — (\$47.00 minimum). Capitalized words 40¢ per word additional.

ADDITIONAL INCOME

ASSEMBLE OUR DEVICES (Electronic). We send parts and pay for assembly. Beginners welcome. Write: Electronic Development Lab, Box 1560D, Pinellas Park, Florida 33565.

HOW I made \$900,000 the lazy way. Complete book \$12.00 information. O.L. Walker, 1010 Montreat Road, Black Mountain, North Carolina 28711.

AUTHOR'S SERVICE

LOOKING for a publisher? Learn how you can have your book published, promoted, distributed. Send for free booklet. HP-5, Vantage Press, 516 W. 34th St., N.Y., N.Y. 10001.

AVIATION

ANTIGRAVITY PROPULSION DEVICE! Free Brochure, RDA, Box 873, Concord, NC 28025.

BOOKS & PERIODICALS

PUBLISH YOUR BOOK! Join our successful authors. Publicity, advertising, beautiful books. All subjects invited. Send for fact-filled booklet and free manuscript report. Carlton Press, Dept. SMA, 84 Fifth Avenue, New York 10011.

FREE used mysteries catalogue. \$1.25 paperbacks. Hardbound under \$5.00. Choose from thousands. Murder By The Book, Box F-231, Akron, Ohio 44308.

FREE List of hardcover mysteries. Bi-monthly catalogues list 8,000 titles each year. Dunn's Mysteries, 251 Baldwin Ave., Meriden, CT 06450.

I LOVE A MYSTERY Newsletter for mystery fans. Send one 37¢ stamp for sample issue. P.O. Box 6009, Sherman Oaks, CA 91403.

DISCOVER A REMARKABLE NEW YOU! Wealth, health, success, happiness WILL be yours! Write P.F.T. Associates, Inc. Dept. 12, P.O. Box 216, Montrose, New York 10548.

BOOKS & PERIODICALS—Cont'd

MYSTERY Bookstore issues free monthly catalog of new books. The Butler Did It, 10449A Green Mountain, Columbia, MD 21044.

60,000 Science Fiction and Mystery Paperbacks, Hardcover, Magazines. Free Catalogs! Grant Thiessen, Box Z-86A, Neche, ND 58265-0133.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

STAY HOME! MAKE MONEY ADDRESSING ENVELOPES. VALUABLE GENUINE OFFER. 20¢. Write Lindco, 3636-DA Peterson Ave., Chicago, IL 60659.

INTEREST Free Money! No Collateral! No Co-Signers! No Credit Checks! Write Now For Free Details! Grants-DPC1284, Box 2298, Sandusky, OH 44870-7298.

LUCRATIVE opportunity. Fast selling, guaranteed Products. Repeat customers everywhere. No investment. High profit. Details \$2.00 Refundable: Williams, 605, Ocean View, New Jersey 08230.

GOOD MONEY! Weekly! Processing Mail! Free Ads, Supplies, Postage! Information? Rush stamped envelope! Foodmaster-DC3, Burnt Hills, NY 12027.

BUMPER STICKER PRINTING DEVICE. Cheap, Simple, Portable. Free details: Bumper, POB 22791(TW), Tampa, FL 33622

EARN money depositing special coupons at your supermarket(s) for consumer refund reports. Enclose stamped envelope. Consumer Services, B9-C, Orangeburg, NY 10962.

BECOME SELF-EMPLOYED, no experience necessary. **GUARANTEED SUCCESS.** No inventory to maintain. **START IMMEDIATELY.** We fill orders on thousands of **WARRANTED** items. Receive complete wholesale package. **FREE 10 DAY EXAMINATION, \$25.00 (Refundable).** West Coast Associates Ltd., 13562 Vanowen, Suite 18, Van Nuys, California 91405.

PLACE

CLASSIFIED

AH JAN./84.

To be included in the next issue please send order and remittance to I. M. Bozoki, Classified Ad Manager, DAVIS PUBLICATIONS, INC., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES—Cont'd

\$1,000 Weekly Home Business Directory. Free Details: Name and address, to: Box 1610-IO, Darien, Connecticut, 06820-1610.

SELL Money-making Books by Mail. Excellent profits possible working just part time. Details \$1.00. Joseph Salvucci, 22 Shepard St., Boston, MA 02135.

BIG PROFITS! YOUR OWN BUSINESS. Giftwares, Novelties below wholesale. Write: Gifthouse, Box 99-DPI, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11229.

BUY IT WHOLESALE

400,000 BARGAINS Below Wholesale! Many Free! Liquidations...Closeouts...Job Lots...Single Samples. Free Details. Worldwide Bargainhunters, Box 730-IO, Holland, MI 49423.

DISTRIBUTORS WANTED

EARN a Fistful of money with UNIQUE Products everyone must have. NOT SOLD IN STORES. Details and sample send \$5. to: J&M Research, 10855 West Loyola, Los Altos, Calif. 94022.

EMPLOYMENT INFORMATION

FLORIDA JOBS. Direct contact with employers that are now hiring. Details \$1.00. RBH, 444 Brickell Ave. Plaza 51-263, Miami, Florida 33131.

GOVERNMENT SURPLUS

"GOVERNMENT SURPLUS" JEEPS \$30.00! 5,000,000 Items! Complete Information Your Area. Largest OFFICIAL Directory. \$3.00 (Guaranteed). SURPLUS (A606), 4620 Wisconsin Northwest, WASHINGTON, D.C. 20016.

ARMY SURPLUS, many items. Pants \$1.00, shirts \$1.00, boots \$10.00. Information \$4.00, refund on first order. Lawton Surplus, Box 764, Lawton, OK 73501.

PLEASE Be sure to include your zip code when ordering merchandise from classified advertisements. You'll receive faster delivery.

HOBBIES & COLLECTIONS

GREAT RADIO PROGRAMS—mystery, adventure, science-fiction. Free list cassettes. Rare Radio, Box 117, Sunland, CA 91040.

HYPNOTISM

FREE Catalog. Hypnotism, Hypnotic cassettes, sleep learning. Become the person you truly want to be. DLMH, Box 487, Anaheim, CA 92805.

INVENTIONS WANTED

EARN Royalties from your invention or new product idea. Nuprodux International, 1377 K St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20005.

JEWELRY

CLOSEOUT JEWELRY. 55¢ Dozen. 25¢ gets catalog. ROUSSELS, 107-910 Dow, Arlington, MA 02174-7199.

LOANS BY MAIL

BORROW \$30,000 without interest! All eligible. Repay anytime. Free details. Info-house 508-AH, 533 Sutter, San Francisco, CA 94102.

\$LOANS\$ ON SIGNATURE TO—\$100,000! Any purpose. Details Free. ELITE, Box 206-DG, East Rockaway, New York 11518.

BORROW By Mail! Signature Loans, No Collateral! Many More Unique Services Available. Write! Free Details! MBG-DPC184, Box 2298, Sandusky, OH 44870-7298.

BORROW \$25,000 "OVERNIGHT." Any purpose. Keep indefinitely! Free Report reveals little-known sources/techniques! Success Research, Box 19739-SM, Indianapolis, IN 46219.

MAILING LISTS

MAILING LISTS. 39 categories. Free information, E Lobeck, 251 Sunset Avenue, Englewood, N.J. 07631.

EAGER Mailorder Buyers. Opportunity Seekers names on adhesive labels. 100/\$2.75; 300/\$6.50; 500/\$9.50; 1000/\$13.50; 2000/\$25.00. Guaranteed. Moderverbest, Box 1089-T, Doylestown, Pennsylvania 18901-0089.

Classified Continued

MAILORDER OPPORTUNITIES

SINCERE BOOK SALES AGENTS WANTED NOW! Part time or full. Do not confuse with usual worn-out offers. No experience needed. Full Details send \$1.00 to: Neuco Publications, 815 LaBrea Ave. Suite 241-DP, Inglewood, California 90302.

SCORE UNLIMITED PROFITS! New LCD Quartz hand-held games. No Investment. We dropship. **FREE** brochure. TY Enterprises, Inc., P.O. Box 35421, Detroit, MI 48235.

Sexual Aids, Books, Games, Novelties. Send \$3.00 for full details and 36 page colored catalog. Hesheids, Box 605, Oceanview, New Jersey 08230.

MEMORY IMPROVEMENT

INSTANT MEMORY...NEW WAY TO REMEMBER. No memorization. Release your **PHOTOGRAPHIC** memory. Stop forgetting! **FREE** information. Institute of Advanced Thinking, 845DP, ViaLapaz, Pacific Palisades, CA 90272.

MISCELLANEOUS

OLDTIME radio programs. Suspense, drama, science fiction, comedies. Highly enjoyable tapes. Free catalogue. Carl D. Froelich, Route One, New Freedom, Pennsylvania 17349.

YOUR Success Book—The Holy Bible. Read it for yourself. Easy Guidelines. Free Details. Readers, Box 11652-HQ, Houston, Texas 77293.

MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES

\$750 WEEKLY POSSIBLE Mailing Circulars! Easy Guaranteed Income! No Experience Needed! Start Immediately! Free Details: **PUBLICATIONS**, Box 2096-D, Niagara Falls, NY 14301.

\$200.00 to \$400.00 WEEKLY working at home. **NO EXPERIENCE NECESSARY.** All ages. National Company. **FREE INFORMATION.** Send a Self-Addressed Stamped Envelope to: P.L., 1465 Charmaine, Baton Rouge, LA 70806.

INSIDERS GUIDE TO WINNING CONTESTS. Learn the winning techniques today. Send \$3.95 now to: Contesting, P.O. Box 23343A, Richfield, Minnesota 55423.

MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES—Cont'd

NEED CASH? Make a Good Income in the comfort of your home! Information? 25¢ to: Wyant, Box 14490, Cleveland, Ohio 44114.

JOIN Mail-Stack, a new computerized international sponsoring club that quickly builds a 'multi-level downline organization for you. No Selling, No Inventory, No Bookwork, No High Quotas. Name, #10 sase: Mail-Stack, Inc., 1240 8th Street, P.O. Box 1227, Daytona Beach, FL 32017-5227.

NEED HELP? Get\$\$\$MONEY\$\$, Success, Happiness, Free Car and much more! Write Today! **AMERICAN HELP**, 3909 South Boulevard, Suite 208DM, Charlotte, NC 28209.

BUY CHEAP direct Hong Kong & Taiwan. Trade Suppliers. All types products wholesale! Small lots. Rocchio Enterprises, 4405 Aldrich Ave., So. Minneapolis, MN 55409.

\$60.00 per Hundred securing-stuffing envelopes from home. Offer-details: Rush stamped self-addressed envelope. Imperial, P-460, X17410, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33318.

GUARANTEED weekly income! Easy program mailing our circulars. Free supplies. Experience unnecessary. Start immediately. Write: Bond, Box 1147, Melbourne, FL 32901.

"EARN THOUSANDS!" GUARANTEED PROCESSING STAMPED ENVELOPES! SPECTACULAR HOME PROFITS! START IMMEDIATELY! FREE SUPPLIES! FREE DETAILS! WRITE! MJG-DPG, AMBLER, PA 19002.

OF INTEREST TO ALL

"BUY REPOSSESSED HOMES FROM GOVT! \$1.00 PLUS REPAIRS—TAXES! THRU-OUT U.S. DETAILS \$3.95. HOME-STEAD, P.O. 4385-B67, YUMA, AZ 85364.

NEED HELP? Visa, MasterCard, Loans! No credit check! Guaranteed! **AMERICAN CREDIT HELP**, 3909 South Boulevard, Suite 208DH, Charlotte, NC 28209.

PSYCHOANALYSIS UNAFFORDABLE? Professional researcher and staff specialize in the interpretation of dreams. Include information about age, sex, family background, and current life situation. Detailed personal analysis \$5.00 per dream and **SASE**. Dream Research Associates, Dept. L, Box 914, Tuckerton, NJ 08087.

Classified Continued

AH JAN./84.

PERSONAL

SINGLE? Widowed? Divorced? Nationwide introduction! Hundreds of sincere members! All Ages! Free information! Write: Identity, Box 315-DT, Royal Oak, Michigan 48068.

SINGLE? Meet that special person—anywhere! Very low fees. **DATELINE**, 316 Fifth Ave., New York 10001. (202) 328-1300 or (513) 821-4600 or (612) 888-1240.

EASILY save 50% on coffee. Introducing amazing new coffee discovery. Sample, Details \$1. Coffee, 4421J 139th Ave., S.E., Bellevue, WA 98006.

FREE CATALOG! Credit, Divorce, Privacy, Tax, Employment! Problems? Our Books have solutions. Write: Eden, 11623 Slater, Box 8410-A, Fountain Valley, CA 92728.

SOPHISTICATED SCANDINAVIANS, all ages, seek enlightened correspondence, friendship, marriage. Details: Scannalub, Dept. CO3, POB 4, Pittsford, NY 14534.

FREE—PHOTO-ALBUM Faithful, affectionate, home-loving desirable Asian Ladies seek lifetime partners, friendship—4959U Hollywood Blvd., Hollywood, CA 90027 (213) 662-3184.

ORIENTAL Ladies. Faithful, traditional, affectionate. Thousands seeking marriage, now! Cherry Blossoms, Box 1021DA, Honokaa, Hawaii 96727.

PROBLEMS? For layman's personal, objective and confidential response, send written problem, \$5 and SASE to Pamela, Choices and Consequences, P.O. Box 494, N. Hollywood, CA 91603 (6115 Clybourne Ave. 26, N. Hollywood, CA 91606).

BEAUTIFUL, sincere and devoted Oriental ladies want correspondence, friendship and marriage. Free information. Filam, Box A3713-0, Chicago, IL 60690.

AMAZING Adult Mail Order! Earns \$1000 weekly! We did it! Free details: Jill Kane, Contemporary Mail-Order, Box 1600-AF, Venice, FL 32484-1600.

RADIO & TELEVISION

CABLE TV DESCRAMBLERS and **CONVERTERS. PLANS** and **PARTS.** Build or Buy. For information send \$2.00. C&D Electronics, P.O. Box 21, Jenison, MI 49428.

RADIO & TELEVISION—Cont'd

CABLE TV Descramblers, converters. Build, buy, catalog \$2.00: J.D.T. Electronics, Inc., P.O. Box 8274, Dept. B, Grand Rapids, MI 49508.

RADIO MYSTERIES

CBS Mystery Theatres—424 Hours on Cassettes, Reels or 8-Tracks. Superb Quality! Catalog \$1.00. P.O. Box 3509-AH, Lakeland, FL 33802.

RECORDS, TAPE & SOUND EQUIPMENT

FREE Promotional albums, concert tickets, stereos, etc. Information: Barry Publications, 477 82nd Street, Brooklyn, New York 11209.

SONGWRITERS

POEMS WANTED. Songs recorded and published. Radio-TV promotions. Broadway Music Productions, Box 7438-DA, Sarasota, FL 33578.

SONGWRITERS: Exciting offer! Poems, songs needed. Free evaluation. Creative Music Productions, Box 1943-A1, Houston, TX 77251-1943.

STAMP COLLECTING

WORLDWIDE stamps—25 for 25¢ with approvals. Pay for what you keep, return remainder. Hixson Enterprises, Dept. C, Box 2089, Satellite Beach, FL 32937.

FREE gifts with trial selection of Worldwide approvals for new and intermediate collectors. Loring, 2767 Marion Avenue, Bronx, NY 10458.

TRAVEL/TOURS

UNIQUE MYSTERY TOURS. In search of Agatha Christie, Sherlock Holmes, Lord Peter Wimsey and more! Murder weekend at English manor! Meet mystery authors! Free brochures: ICTS, 4133 Taylor, San Diego, CA 92110. Telephone toll-free: 800-428-7825 ex 41 (USA) or 800-428-7824 ex 41 (California).

UNUSUAL BOOKS

THE INTELLIGENCE LIBRARY: Many unique books & official manuals on **RESTRICTED** subjects—Bugging, Wiretapping, Locksmithing, Covert Investigation, & **MUCH MORE.** Free brochures, MENTOR, DP, 135-53 No. Blvd., Flushing, N.Y. 11354.

GET 12 BEST-SELLING MYSTERIES FOR \$1.

GET \$137.50 WORTH OF MACDONALD, CHARTERIS, JOHNSTON
AND 9 OTHER GREAT WRITERS FOR \$1.

As a new member of The Detective Book Club, you'll make your first big killing on our introductory offer: 12 of the best recently-published mysteries for \$1.

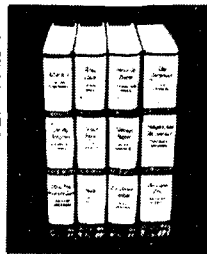
You'll savor baffling murder cases, international intrigue, innocent people caught in a web of evil; terror touched by the supernatural. All served up with the intricate plotting, bizarre twists and gripping action that are the hallmarks of the great modern masters.

Bought in a bookstore, they'd cost \$137.50. But as a new member of The Detective Book Club, you get all 12 tales shown for only \$1...in four handsome, hardbound, triple-volumes.

As a member, you'll get the Club's free monthly Preview, which describes in advance each month's selections. They're chosen by the Club's editors, who select the best from more than 400 mysteries published each year. You may reject any volume before or after receiving it, within 21 days; there's no minimum number of books you must buy. And you may cancel your membership at any time.

When you accept a club selection, you get three complete, full-length detective novels in one hardcover triple-volume like the ones shown on this page for only \$8.95. That's \$2.98 per mystery — at least \$6 (and sometimes \$8 or \$9) less than just one costs in the publishers' original editions.

Recent selections have included new thrillers by top names like those featured here, plus Len Deighton, Dick Francis and many others. Start enjoying the benefits of membership in The Detective Book Club. Send no money now. You'll be billed later for your 12 mysteries. Send the coupon today to: The Detective Book Club, Roslyn, N.Y. 11576.



Please enroll me as a member and send me at once my 4 triple-volumes shown here, containing 12 mysteries. I enclose no money now. I may examine my books for one week, then will either accept all four volumes for the special new member price of only \$1 plus shipping, or return them and owe nothing.

As a member, I will receive free the Club's monthly Preview, which describes my next selection. I will always have at least ten days to reject any selection by returning the form provided. I may return any book sent for full credit within 21 days. For each monthly triple-volume I keep, I will send you only \$8.95, plus shipping. I understand I may cancel my membership at any time.

3-FN

D21M7S

THE DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB, ROSLYN, N.Y. 11576.

Mr./Mrs./Ms. _____

Street _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

PUBLISHED BY
WALTER J. BLACK, INC.

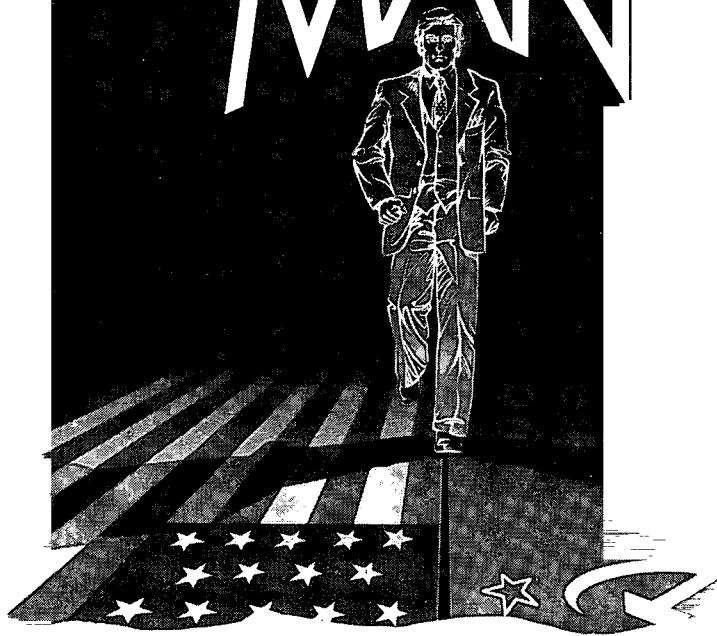


ESTABLISHED 1923

Note: Members accepted in U.S.A. and Canada only; offer slightly different in Canada.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

JONATHAN EVAN THE SOLITARY MAN



"A fascinating book." — Len Deighton

"THE SOLITARY MAN... like being on a roller coaster of terror and suspense. My hat's off to Jonathan. A marvelous book—I want to see more of him."
— Sean Flannery

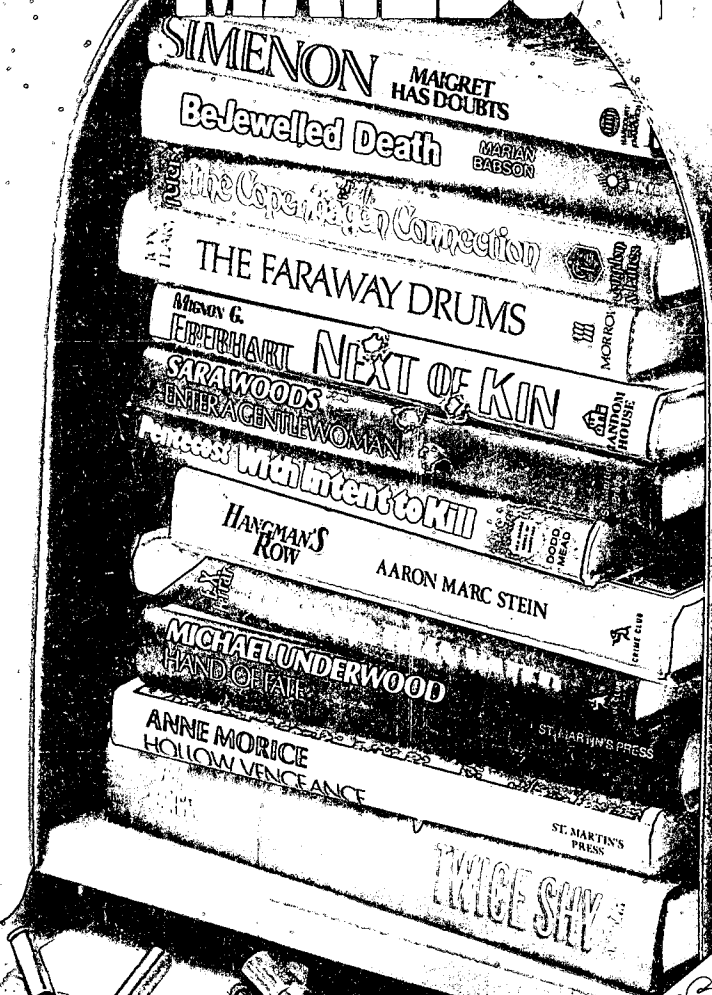
"Riveting... THE SOLITARY MAN is a wonderful read, on a par with the best of John le Carre and the thoughtful thrillers of Graham Greene."
— Cleveland Plain Dealer

ISBN 812-50-279-5 \$3 95 448 PAGES OCTOBER
CANADIAN EDITION ISBN 812-50-280-9 \$4 50

TOR BOOKS (A) **We're Part of the Future**

ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MURDER IN YOUR MAILBOX



IN THIS ISSUE
SPECIAL OFFER FROM
THE DETECTIVE
BOOK CLUB
For details see last